

The Influence of Online Visual Merchandising on Impulse Purchasing

Phuong Le



Author(s) Phuong Le	
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<p>This bachelor's thesis presents a research about the influence of online visual merchandising on impulse purchasing behavior. The research was commissioned by the company Veo's (veosbykhanh), an apparel brand in Vietnam, in order to analyze and improve the online visual merchandising situation of the company's newly established website.</p> <p>Apparel firms attract consumers through the presentation of the merchandise, which means visual merchandising. Traditional visual merchandising in physical stores is not considered a new concept to apparel sellers, because visual merchandising has been adapted into practice for many years. However, given the e-retailing context, online visual merchandising is rather a new concept, which is now taken into consideration, as e-commerce has been developing rapidly in the past years.</p> <p>The relationship between traditional visual merchandising and impulse buying behavior has been identified through several studies, but the relation between online visual merchandising and online impulse buying still lacks of research.</p> <p>In this thesis, elements of online visual merchandising are discussed based on traditional visual merchandising literature and online visual merchandising research available. In the latter part, a quantitative research method was applied under the form of survey to study the influence of online visual merchandising on consumer's' impulse purchasing.</p> <p>Through the thesis, three elements of online visual merchandising, which are manner of presentation, website environment and aesthetics of presentation, are discussed. Online visual merchandising and its three elements are suggested to have positive influence on impulse buying behavior. Some elements in details have positive impact on impulse buying, while some others have negative impact. Visual display supports customer's purchase intention. Website environment is suggested to have impact toward the customer experience. Aesthetics of product presentation and website is suggested to follow the preference of customers. Based on the research, the online visual merchandising situation of case company's website is evaluated and recommendation towards the website are made at the end of the thesis.</p>	
Keywords Online visual merchandising, Visual merchandising, Impulse purchase, Customer buying behavior, Website Environment	

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1 Introduction

Online visual merchandising processes a strategic benefit toward apparel brands, however, online visual merchandising has not been studied in a comprehensive manner (Ha, Kwon & Lennon 2007, 477). This chapter briefly discusses about online visual merchandising practice in apparel brands and the situation of impulse buying. On the other hand, the chapter introduces the case company Veo's, the research and other elements involved with the research.

1.1 Background

Visual merchandising, is the merchandise's presentation to attract potential customers and to motivate customers' purchasing intention (Diamond & Diamond 2010, 6). Visual merchandising is proven to have contribution to impulse buying by various studies by Kim (2003) and Gudonaviciene & Alijosiene (2015). Visual merchandising processes an important role in the fashion retailing, demonstrating the look and the feel of the brand, improving sales and increasing brand awareness. However, in recent years, when e-commerce has stepped in the field, along with the rise of different online channels such as websites and social media sites, **online visual merchandising** has been showing its effectiveness in e-tailing. Online apparel sales had provided outstanding results (Kha-kimdjanova & Park 2004, 307). Therefore, focusing on online visual merchandising could bring extra major benefits towards the brand, and might even have influence on customer buying behavior.

The pace of the fashion industry has never been slow, as trends differ from days to days. In order to stand out from the crowd, a brand is expected to offer customers unique brand experiences. When retailing in-store, the real – time experiences influence and alter every customer decision. However, when it comes to e-commerce, it is all about creating brand experience online, creating a "space" which is identical to the space in real – time experience in – store (Byrne 1999). Online visual merchandising tributes to the effort of creating the space for the consumer through the Web to experience the true concept of the brand. Visual identity is undoubtedly a necessity of marketing and developing an online fashion brand, which could make the brand's products recognizable and standing out from other similar products on the market (Byrne 1999).

But how is online visual merchandising associate with impulse buying, especially with online apparel shopping? **Impulse purchasing** is an immediate, persistent, unintentional

urge of buying something, which is hedonically complex and might result in emotional conflict in an individual (Rook 1987, 189). Given the online context, online consumers show more impulsive acts than consumers of bricks-and-mortar stores, thus leading to impulse buying. The tendency of overspending is likely to happen, because the process of online transaction does not give the consumers the experience of actual spending (Park, Kim, Funches & Foxx 2012, 3). According to a study by Kim (2008, 895), clothing ranked second, only after travel ticket and reservation, in online purchase intention; and ranked first in sensory products category (includes accessories and jewelry, cosmetics and beauty products and clothing). Moreover, due to Kim (2008, 896), impulse buying tendency was more influenced to buying intention for sensory products than planned buying tendency was.

Vietnam is an internet – influenced country, with 53.86 million internet users in 2017 and 59.48 million users predicted in 2022 (Statista 2018). Vietnamese e – commerce is on the rise and in 2015, 64% of online purchases felt on clothing, footwear and cosmetic (Statista 2018). As the results, building a brand online in Vietnam might be the most suitable and profitable way possible for small brands. However, in Vietnam, fashion industry is shifted and changed rapidly, similar fashion brands appear on the market; therefore, it's important to create a unique visual identity not only off-line but also online. In this case, the online visual merchandising could play a crucial part of the whole visual branding of Veo's to be recognizable and appealing.

Visual merchandising benefit is undeniable; however, online visual merchandising has not been researched in a comprehensive manner (Ha 2006, 16-20). Therefore, the author wants to investigate into the online context of visual merchandising, to understand how an “unreal” environment on the Web could sell an apparel piece to a person through a computer or even a mobile screen.

1.2 The company

Veo's (Veo's 2018) was founded in 2014 by two young ladies. The head store remains in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. The brand's products focus on both designed clothing and imported clothing, both focuses on women's apparel. The case company Veo's is an apparel brand, which mainly focuses on women's apparel. Veo's was founded in Vietnam, a Southeast Asia nation developing rapidly through the generation of internet and social media. As a young and small fashion brand, one of the best way for the brand Veo's to capture the consumer's heart is to create a great online brand experience. The main brand Veo's introduces designed clothing with higher price range and its sub – branded The

Sheep holds in – store imported clothing with lower price range. The target customers for the brand is women from the age 18-25 with a simple minimalism clothing style. The fashion style of Veo's is vastly influenced by Eastern lifestyles and cultures. After three years of operating, the brand gains an enormous fame within Hanoi's young generation. Currently, aside from their main store in Hanoi, their business mainly runs on social media sites like Facebook and Instagram. Their Facebook pages gain 129,460 followers (Veo's) and 76,596 followers (The Sheep). Their Instagram accounts have 58,500 followers (Veo's) and 42,900 followers (The Sheep). Their social media sites gain a large number of frequent followers and the interactions between the customers and the brands are remarkably high.

The company is building a second store which is expected to be opened in the beginning of summer. Their website is newly introduced and the content still has to rely on those from social media sites, which limits the quality of the website.

1.3 Objectives

The company Veo's recently introduces the apparel website, and expects to gain a fair number of customers buying through this new channel. However, since the website is newly published, the content, visual arrangement and online visual merchandising are weak and have to rely on their social media sites content.

The objective of the thesis is to analyze **how online visual merchandising practice influences on consumer impulse buying behavior**, therefore put the knowledge on empirical context of the case company and give recommendation for the company. The following investigate questions indicate details research structure of the thesis.

Investigate Question 1: How does online visual merchandising and impulse buying operate on apparel website channel?

In this question, the research of how online visual merchandising performs is discussed. What elements are included in website visual merchandising is studied. With the focus on apparel website, the readers will gain additional knowledges of website branding and an apparel brand visual identity. On the other hand, aspects about the practice of impulse purchasing are discussed.

Investigate Question 2: How does online visual merchandising influence consumer impulse buying?

The research links the practice of online visual merchandising and consumer impulse buying through quantitative method. The attribute of online visual merchandising towards impulse buying is studied. The question also focuses on how different elements of online visual merchandising together generate impacts.

Investigate Question 3: What is the current online visual merchandising situation of the website of the case company Veo's?

Base on the research in Investigate Question 1, the author analyzed the case company's website and its performance of online visual merchandising. Details and elements are point out and studied. Moreover, recommendations upon the case company website are made as the results of the research.

Table 1 below presents the theoretical framework, research methods and results for each investigative question.

Table 1: Overlay matrix

Investigative question	Theoretical Framework	Research Methods	Results
IQ 1. How does online visual merchandising and impulse buying operate on apparel website channel?	Online visual merchandising Website Environment Model of Impulse Purchasing process Impulse buying	Desktop research	The situation of online visual merchandising on apparel website is clearly seen. How online visual merchandising is performing and on what level that sellers and buyers are aware of online visual merchandising.
IQ 2. How does online visual merchandising influence consumer's impulse purchase?	Impulse buying Customer buying behavior Model of Impulse Purchasing process	Quantitative method (Survey)	The factors of online visual merchandising which are affecting impulse buying are stated and discussed.
IQ 3. What is the current online visual merchandising situation of the	Online visual merchandising Website environment	Content analysis, Data analysis	The situation of the case company's website is clarified, discussed and studied.

website of the case company Veo's?			Recommendation to the case company will be given.
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1.4 Demarcation

Online visual merchandising practice occurs on different channels, for instant, website, social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and more. In this research, the scope of the study is limited to website online visual merchandising only, which could lead to direct purchase decision.

1.5 Benefits to stakeholders

Through the research, the important of online visual merchandising will be aware by different parties. The case company Veo's is able to analyze the effectiveness and the weakness of their current strategies, therefore, improve themselves further. As the strategies are improved, the customers will be welcomed with better brand experiences, engaging more with the brand, which benefits both parties, the brand and their customers. In personal aspects, the research concludes the author's study as a bachelor degree student, gaining herself an experience with visual merchandising and impulse buying concept.

1.6 International Aspect

Even though the case company currently focuses on Vietnamese market, the company owners want to investigate the online visual merchandising practice globally, hence adapting the findings into the brand Veo's. On the other hand, online visual merchandising concept is incredibly new and has only been used in international market. Therefore, the learning towards international brands and their experiences will be observed and put back into practices.

1.7 Key concepts

Visual merchandising is the action of combining effective merchandise selection with effective merchandise display (Walters 1987, 238).

Online visual merchandising is practice of visual merchandising on apparel web sites (Ha & al. 2007, 479). Online visual merchandising is expected to do the same goal as visual merchandising in store: to attract customers, give them a good time and encourage them to purchase goods (Ha 2006, 17).

Impulse buying is the situation when a customer makes a sudden, unintentionally and immediate purchase of a product (Rook 1987, 189; Park & al. 2012, 1).

Consumer buying behavior is the study of an individual, groups, organizations' ways of buying and disposing of goods (Kotler & Keller 2011).

2 Theoretical framework

The following chapter gives out the practice of online visual merchandising and impulse purchasing in e-tailing context. Online visual merchandising has not been studied in a good manner in previous research (Ha & al. 2007, 477). Therefore, in this chapter, all online visual merchandising elements are discussed, following previous studies available and the practice of traditional visual merchandising. Theories and factors concern impulse buying behavior are also discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

2.1 Apparel website's online visual merchandising and impulse purchasing

Following Churchill & Peter (1998, 142)'s model of consumer buying process, Kim (2003, 9) developed a model of impulse buying process (Figure 1). As the nature of impulse buying is the irresistible urge of purchase immediately (Rook 1987, 189), the process of impulse purchase is different from normal consumer buying process. In Churchill & Peter (1998, 142)'s model, consumer buying process starts with the need of recognition, following by information search and alternative evaluation, which leads to purchase decision and post-purchase evaluation. On the other hand, the impulse buying process starts with browsing or product awareness, as the shoppers do not have any prior intentions of buying any merchandise. When browsing, consumers urge to purchase on impulse as they are provoked with stimuli. To the extent that the customers find their desire to buy the product, they make the buying decision without evaluation and information searching. The customers, at this stage, feel the urge to buy the products regardless of prior intention. Later on, the post-evaluation might result in positive and negative consequences, depending on their impulse experience. (Kim 2003.)

With the research of traditional visual merchandising and impulse purchase, Kim (2003, 15-18) pointed out the impulse buying process is influenced by external and internal factors. As the customers enter the store without any buying intention, external and internal factors impact on customers while browsing and create their desire. The factors and elements are shown in Figure 1 below.

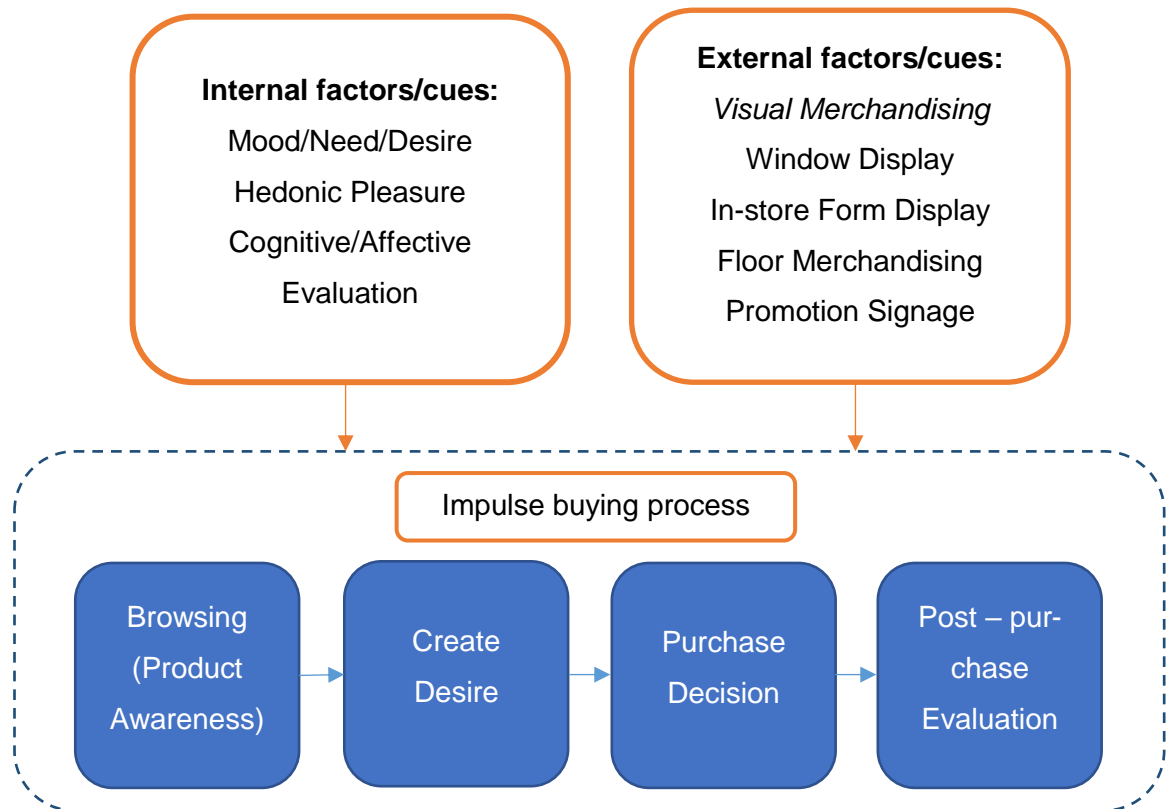


Figure 1: A Model of Impulse Purchasing Process (Kim 2003, 9)

Due to the thesis topic, the focus is mainly on the external factors, and in e-tailing environment. Adapted from Kim (2003, 9)'s model, the new established model concerns with online visual merchandising and impulse buying (Figure 2). Derived from traditional visual merchandising research by Pegler (2012) and Diamond & Diamond (2011), other previous studies about online visual merchandising practice of e-merchants (Ha & al. 2007; Khakimdjonova & Park 2005), online visual merchandising involves three aspects: **Manner of presentation**, **Website environment** and **Aesthetic of presentation**. Manner of presentation concerns with product presentation, presentation techniques along with supplementary presentation. Website environment describes the new environment of the shop, instead of traditional brick-and-mortar store, which is the website. The website environment involves design factors, navigation on the Web and so on. Aesthetics of presentation discusses about the aesthetic aspect of products and the website.

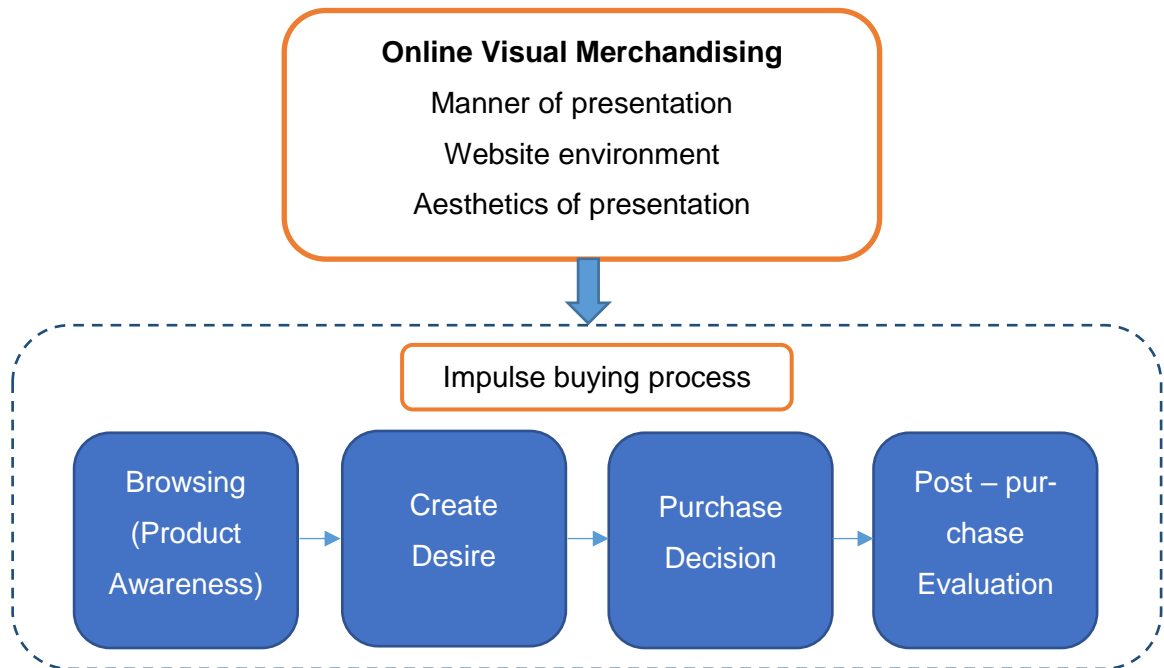


Figure 2: A Model of Impulse Purchasing Process and Online Visual Merchandising
(Adapted from Kim 2003)

The remaining sections discuss about the practice of online visual merchandising and the impulse buying behavior on the Web. Moreover, the study will suggest a connection between the two, and will research further in latter parts of the thesis.

2.2 Online visual merchandising on apparel website

Traditional visual merchandising consists of several elements such as: Manner of presentation, presentation technique, supplementary presentation, aesthetic of presentation, and display structure and layout (Khakimdjanova and Park 2005, 310). Given into e-retailing context, the chapter discusses about the practice of visual merchandising of apparel e-merchants through the following element: (1) manner of presentation, (2) website environment and (3) aesthetic of presentation.

2.2.1 Manner of presentation

The manner of presentation involves all visual merchandising elements that associate with presenting products and product information (Ha & al. 2007, 486). The following section discusses the manner of presentation with several aspects: product presentation, presentation technique and supplementary presentation.

Product presentation

Product presentation contains four attributes, including: the use of mannequin, human model, hanger and flat surface (Khakimdjanova and Park 2005, 311). Each of the presentation shows different perspectives, nurturing different strengths and weaknesses. The use of the four manners can be used separately, or all together. Some e-merchants use a single type of elements, while some use two or more combined. To Then and Delong (1999, 67), the manner of presentation needs to be adjusted based on the preference of visual of the customers.

Mannequins

Mannequins are considered one of the central parts of visual merchandising, and being said as “focal point” and have been newly further developed (Diamond & Diamond 2011, 88). Unlike in the past where mannequins stayed as plain, simple posing artificial human form, recent mannequins are carefully selected, garnished and are posed to convey a specific theme by the seller. Six types of mannequins are traditional human forms, ethnic mannequins, stylized human forms, futuristic human form, representational human forms and trimmer – constructed mannequins. Choosing a mannequin, the seller should take into consider their target market audience, the brand’s clothing and their fashion statements (Pegler 2012, 102). The more relatable the customers to the mannequin, the better the result.

Even though a special type of mannequins looks special and attractive, it could be hard to use and apply. On the other hand, **traditional realistic mannequins** bring the same effects if used with the right manner. Limited budget stores and conventional apparel stores make use of this mannequin type, fitting with different types of attires. The use and mix of different make-up, wig and posing transform the ordinary and create new impressions. (Diamond & Diamond, 89.)

In diverse-culture country, the use of **ethnic mannequins** is taken more into practice. The multicultural demographics of a nation is observed and buying power and behavior are considered. In America, the number of American Caucasian holds the majority, but the number of African – American, Hispanic, Latinos and Asian American are increasing and closing the gap (Diamond and Diamond 2011, 89). The need to attract these major minorities through visual merchandising is important, as they might hold potential buying behavior, whether in apparel merchandise, cosmetics or accessories. The mannequins used now include more African – American, Hispanic and Asian model. The mix of these mannequins are used along with normal Caucasian types. It is necessary to use the mix of mannequins to symbolize the mix of ethnicities in the trading environment, the use of

mannequins should only be restricted to one culture if the theme is special direct to that culture customers.

A **stylized human form** type is the one in use when a store wants to separate itself from others, but still sticks to the ordinary mannequin body. A stylized human form mannequin is similar to normal mannequins, but offer a pace change to itself. This mannequin might have a different skin tones than human flesh; a body stroke appears on the body that is also different from normal; a special make-up elements; or a style of “hair” which is not a normal removable wig, but made of clay or any other special garments or is the part of the mannequin itself. The mannequins are expected to have the reality of pose, human normal features and are capable of display the suitable variety of merchandise (Diamond & Diamond 2011, 89). This type of mannequins is not regularly used in normal context, but rather used for special campaign or special department (Diamond & Diamond, 89).

Futurist human forms mannequin features a realistic look of a mannequin, and is exaggerated a little but not to the extent of stylized human form type. The colorization of the mannequins is special, and the shape of the head might be in any shapes like egg – shaped or cones, or the coating finish is shinny and glittery. They are designed to keep the details of normal mannequins but still attract attention. (Diamond & Diamond, 89-90.)

When having limited budgets, the seller could use representative forms to serve as a normal mannequin purpose with lower cost. A proper mannequin might cost more than \$1,000 which sometime saves a fortune if the seller finds an alternative. The **representative forms** are made of diverse materials, only limited to creativity, such as woods, pipes or tubs and decorations. This form is useful when a store lacks of visual merchandising professionals, and the clothes are easy to change and adjust on the “mannequin”. A trimmer – constructed mannequin is considered the manufacturer’s representative form of mannequin, which displays a simple mannequin with inexpensive materials. (Diamond & Diamond, 91.)

On the other hand, aside from a large, full – body mannequins, the need of **a part or a component part of mannequins** is also stated. In the past few years, alternatives to full – body mannequins have been developed and manufactured by various mannequin houses. Dressing a mannequin takes time, money and a talent; which occasionally needs a touch – up or change of wigs. Therefore, alternatives add a new look to the traditional mannequins, allow a new breeze coming to the customers; also create an ease to change the clothes. A three - quarter form is a three-dimensional representative of a mannequins, showing a part of the human body (Pegler 2012, 115). Three – quarter forms show the

torso, the bust, shoulder to waist or hips to ankles (Pegler 2012, 115). This form is capable of wearing a large variety of clothes, can be altered to fit with the clothes itself. They are less expensive than normal mannequins, show better performance than hangers, but have less impact than normal mannequins. Other types of this part include bra form, trunk form, bust or blouse form, coat or suit form, pants or slacks form, panty form, shell form, shirt form, stocking or leg form. Each form shows a particular part of the body, serve a different type of clothing. Brands with special clothing lines, or with an item they want to stand out would make use of these alternatives forms.

Website also uses a form of **invisible mannequins**, which appeared “transparent” to the shoppers. Invisible mannequins still shape the form of the garments but do not disturb the customers eye and make the main focus stay on the merchandise.

Mannequins gather positive responses from the audience, as they allow the customers to observe the design, showing the entire outfits and the combination of colors; supporting the suggestions that mannequins encourage purchases (Kerfoot, Davies & Ward 2003, 149). Some of the brand use invisible mannequins for their online merchandise. However, as in Khakimdjanova and Park (2005, 313) research, only one-fifth of the products presentation on apparel website is on mannequins.

Human model

Garment presentative on a human model is the most preferable technique, but not present in about 40 percent of site (Khakimdjanova and Park 2005, 313). Figure 3 shows example of human model presentation on the case company’s website. In the study by Then and DeLong (1999, 67), the majority of research participants preferred a realistic human model, which was able to display how the merchandise looked on a human body. According to Mears (2011, 16), models do more than just promote the sale of clothing; they represent the idea of how men and women should look with the fashion on them. Models represent the customer bodies, showing how the garments are fitted on their bodies. On the other hand, modelling shows the action of gender performance, interfering with sexuality, races and classes (Mears 2011, 16).

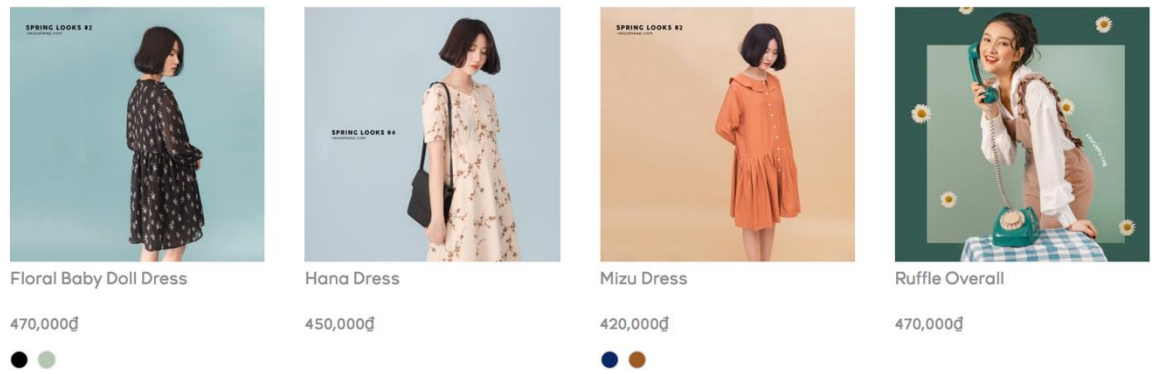


Figure 3: Examples of human model display of Veo's (screenshot)

The use of human model varies between website, but one key different is the presence of a model's face. Out of 32 apparel websites that used human model, 71.9 percent of the websites showed the model face; 18.8 percent showed only the model's body and 9.4 percent of them showed both models with no face and models with face (Yoo and Kim 2012, 63). In advertising, attractive models have positive effects on the ads (Yoo and Kim 2012, 63). In the case that the brand does not have a strong brand image, the facial effectiveness of the models is a driven key of customer's response to the merchandise (Joseph 1982, 20; Yoo and Kim 2012, 63). In apparel e – retailing, the model faces have effects on the response of customers towards the products; which might link to the facial attractiveness aspects. However, facial attractiveness is not the only aspect that decides the physical attractiveness, but undoubtedly facial attractiveness is the most influential element of the physical attractiveness (Joseph 1982, 20; Yoo and Kim 2012, 63). In the findings of the research by Yoo and Kim (2012, 68), the presence of the model face encouraged pleasure and arousal experience; however, the presence of model face had negative effect on perceive amount of information of the merchandise, which means the consumers receives less information when the model faces were shown. This finding led to the fact that when the merchandise is displayed on a human model, more attentions would be on the products if the model face is not shown.

Hangers

To Kerfoot (& al. 2003, 148), hanging was the most attractive presentation as it allowed the garment visible to the eyes, and customer could see everything of the garment. Moreover, hanging adds to the benefits when customers are capable of visualizing the outfit and possibility of mix – and – match. Only small numbers of product presentation were using hangers as hangers might limit the capability to see the silhouette and the final look on a body (Khakimdjanova and Park 2005, 313).

Hangers can be used as alternatives to human models or mannequins; however, without professionalism and taste, it might make the clothes look like they are pulled out of the rack without deeper consideration (Pegler 2012, 123). Hangers, which have more dimension or are equipped with padding or are with a bust form, are ideally used, as they show the garments better. The hangers are hung on invisible wires from ceiling or a hook extend from the walls. They could be decorated based on the theme of the clothes, with ribbons or special colors; or they could be hung on a branch of tree, all to fit the garment's theme (Pegler 2012, 123).

Flat – lay and similar techniques

Flat – lay, or lay – down technique, is a technique involving with folding, pleating and organizing the garments next to one another and accessories to attribute to the featured garment (Pegler 2012, 123). The composition is required and mastered in this technique, as all elements of color, texture, line need to be balanced and be able to attract the customer's eyes. With the flat – lay technique, the purpose is not to show the customers the normal images, but rather show them the combination along with the garments as the customers already know what they want. The flat – lay follows a theme or a color scheme to look synchronized with other garments and accessories available in the flat – lay. According to Pegler (2012, 124), the merchandise is required to be in perfect condition: be pressed and steamed perfectly beforehand. Because of the lay – down nature, there is no opportunity to use the mannequin or the human form to hide and smoothen the wrinkles on the garment. The garments are shown clearly to the customers, bringing it up front and showing small details of the garments to them: the stitching, the button, the pattern and so on. However, similar to the hanging technique, flat – lay limits the view of the customers, which does not allow them to see the silhouette and the final look on a body (Kha-kimdjanova and Park 2005, 313).

One similar technique to flat – lay technique is the folding technique, created by folding the merchandise. Folding clothing makes the merchandise look neat and organized; and aesthetically pleasing (Kerfoot & al. 2003, 148). However, sometimes the display looks too neat, causing anxiety and making customers uncomfortable browsing. The customers do not want to browse the web, being afraid of disturbing the merchandise display.

Pinup technique allows the garments to be pinned and styled on top of any vertical surfaces: a panel or a wall (Pegler 2012, 125). Using without the use of mannequins, the merchandise is pinned on the surfaces and pads are added to where forms are needed. Accessories are pinned along with the garments, following the same rules as the flat – lay technique. The pinup technique is comparable with the flat – lay technique, with the only

different is that the pin – up projects the garment on a vertical surface when the flat – lay projects on a horizontal one. Pinup can be used along with other techniques, for example, use a scarf to hang down from the pinup to a flat – lay arrangement. Pinup and flat – lay presentations are ideally used for alternative of mannequins, and for a change of pace and a different look; however, using them over and over again would cause the same dull effect as using the same mannequin all over (Pegler 2012, 126).

Presentation technique

The presentation technique involves several aspects: product stimulation, coordinated products, whole view of merchandise, picture enlargement and movement presentation (Park 2002, 23-25; Khakimdjanova and Park 2005, 313). According to Then and Delong (1999, 67) and Park (2002, 23), customers are more interested in purchasing products online if more information is shown through the product visual display.

Product stimulation

With product stimulation techniques, two – dimensional view, manual three - dimensional view and automatic three – dimensional view presentations are taken into consideration (Khakimdjanova and Park 2005, 313). In the study by Khakimdjanova and Park (2005, 313), the majority of website used two – dimensional view for their merchandise, only a small number of website used three - dimensional view; which was surprised as three - dimensional view was believed to have a positive effect: show the merchandise from different angles. The view on three - dimensional model is expected to decrease uncertainties when purchasing online (Park 2002, 24). The advantages of three – dimensional viewing has been studied by previous study; however, due to Park and Stoel (2002, 166)'s research, only one of the website offered a three – dimensional virtual model or let the customers try the garments on a body figure resemble the customer's body. The majority of the website only offered two – dimensional view from the front or back.

Recently, the use of videos as product stimulation has been adapted by few retailers. Asos (2018) uses short videos (approximately 10 seconds per video) to demonstrate their products in the product windows. The videos show the model walk, turn and shows the view of the garment from different angles. This new stimulation techniques give customers great benefits, letting them experience the products in a lively manner and does not limit them to photos viewing. The use of different media formats had also been studied by Ade-laar, Chang, Lancendorfer & Morimoto (2003).

Whole view

In the whole view aspect, whole view of the mannequin and whole view of human model are considered. In the research done by Khakimdjanova and Park (2005, 313), more than one – third of websites used mannequins offered whole view on mannequins; the rest of them only showed the lower part of the mannequin. This was believed to limit the view of garments in conjunction with other related items, for instant, a pair of jeans with tops. With the human model, two – third percent of presentation showed the whole view of human model and the remaining only showed the lower part of the model. Showing the whole view could help consumers see the coordination of the set, which gains advantages for consumers.

Coordinated products view

Associated with whole view technique, coordinated products showcase also has a great result upon consumers. The “mix-and-match” strategy requires a harmonization between garments of clothes, thus getting more attention from consumers. According to Lam and Mukerjee (2005, 231), in store – based retailing, product coordination is separated by presentation of color and style. Their study indicated that coordinated clothes received more positive interaction than uncoordinated clothes. The coordinated outfit gained consumers’ aesthetic response and social reaction, both as a whole or as a target individual garment. However, Lam and Mukerjee’s study (2005, 247) showed significant results of men’s wear than women’s wear. In e-retailing, customers are believed to experience more positive states like pleasure and arousal when viewing coordinated products than viewing uncoordinated ones (Yoo & Kim 2012, 67). On the other hand, consumers also receive more perceived information when they view coordinated outfit, which is believed to have positive effect on consumers’ buying intension, especially online buying intension (Yoo & Kim 2012, 68); this will be discussed further in the next part. Customers also view clothes not as an individual garment, but rather as part of the whole. Figure 4 presents a mix-and-match suggestion on the case company’s website.



Figure 4: Mix-and-match coordinated products suggestion of Veo's (screenshot)

Picture enlargement

Attention plays an important role in retailing, the relation between visual display and attention had been studied. In the context, picture enlargement, or “zoom-in” picture, is a necessary feature for any apparel websites, in order to capture attention. Display size influences the attention of consumers (Park 2002, 27). In the “real” market, large advertise prints gathered more attention than smaller prints, even boosting the sales for the larger display products. The relation between size and attention has been studied by various studies, which shows the result that large display size involuntarily increased attention (Park 2002, 27). When applied into e-retailing context, the large size display could capture the consumer’s attention. This feature might make the consumers focus more on the products on the website than moving to another website. The large display easily captures consumers’ attention, on the other hand, when the first display is small, there is the need of display a zoom-in option. The zoom-in option gives the customers a clearer approach on the products, hence supporting them to see the detail of the garments. With the collaboration with coordinated outfit, a picture enlargement help customers not only see the whole outfit, but also see each item in detail. However, despite the benefits of enlarged picture of clothes, the feature was not available in nearly one – third number of the website presentations (Khakimdjanova and Park 2005, 314).

Movement

In a similar context with enlarged pictures, movement is able to capture the consumers' attention. The visual system is sensitive to abrupt movement and flicker, and attention is involuntary gained by visual stimuli (Yantis & Jonides 1984, 601). The object could be unrecognizable until the movement starts, even if the movement starts immediately, the attention is still be captured without the effort of the observer. Movement in e-retailing context varies in different uses: the flash changes of products appearing, vertical and horizontal movement of visual display, or in recent trend, videos. The dynamic movement on the web page easily captures consumers' attention, reducing their intension of leaving the web page. The feature is believed to have the same benefit as enlarged display, gathering customers' focus on to the products. The use of movement on apparel website can be found on several merchants such as Mixxmix (2018) or Chuu (2018).

Supplementary presentation

Supplementary presentation involves with various elements to support the main presentation of the garments: (1) information presentation, (2) coordinated clothes display and product display in conjunction with similar items, (3) color option and alternative body shapes, (4) focused detail display.

Information presentation

Along with visual presentation of the products, information presentation processes a crucial part in e-retailing. Through every visual merchandising, the merchants desire to offer customers with various information so that customers could experience the "click – and mortar" store just like other physical stores. Customers are likely to be interested in purchasing the products more if more information is offered through the product's visual display (Then & DeLong 1999, 67). Research indicated the more perceived information the customer gained, the more purchase intention the customer had (Park & Stoel 2002, 162). Szymanski & Hise (2000, 319) suggested richer information was one of the motivation for online shopping, for better purchase intension and customer satisfaction. Information presentation is indicated by information details through visual and general information in word. Clothes is sensory product, which the consumers are desired to experience the sensory attributes before purchasing (Park & al. 2012, 3). The visual information could be obtained through multiple pictures of the products, product pictures from different angles, coordinated outfit display and focused detail display. With them, the customers experience the garment's sensory attributes such as color, design, fabric and fit (Park & al. 2012, 3). On the other hand, detail description of the products, usage suggestion such as coordinated clothes display or clothes in various usage or in complete outfit support customer

purchase decision. Information such as price, color, care instruction, brand name, fit is often listed in the merchandise's tag. (Park & Stoel 2002, 160-161.) However, in the case of online shopping, customers are unable to examine the garment's tag, therefore it is important for the merchant to list all related information to the products. Detailed information has influenced on customer's perception of risk, and is believed to reduce the risk for customers (Park & Stoel 2002, 162). In Then and DeLong's survey (1999, 67), the majority of customers were interested in written information to be shown on the web, the most interested information was fiber content and laundering instruction, while the country of manufacture information did not gather much intention.

Suggestion of coordinated clothes display and product display in conjunction with similar items

As discussed earlier, the benefit of coordinated clothes display is undeniable, helping the customers to see the garment as part of the outfit instead of a single garment. Merchandise coordinated with other items was available on almost all website (Khakimdjanova and Park 2005, 314). However, not only the merchandises are coordinated with one another in one picture, they are needed to be displayed in separate images, or suggested along with the current products. For example, other garments that are mixed in the pictures are all suggested beneath, like a bag and a skirt that would fit the viewing top garment.

On the other hand, product display in conjunction with similar items has the same effects. Then and DeLong (1999, 67) suggested that the majority of the survey participation was positive to see similar items shown to the current items. For instant, when viewing a jacket, customers are offered similar jackets with them same material or style. This supports creating customer experience, hence improving customer buying decision.

Examples of coordinated products suggestion and similar products suggestion are displayed in Figure 5.

Recommendations



Ruffle Linen Short

390,000đ



Fringe Slides

510,000đ

Other items



Pure String Blouse

350,000đ



Two-way Blouse

360,000đ



Hana Dress

450,000đ



Poppop Sandals

450,000đ



Ruffle Sleeves Tee

270,000đ

Figure 5: Coordinated products display and similar products suggestion (however, in the case company's website, random items are suggested) follow right under the current product (screenshot)

Color option and body shape alternatives

Clothes is sensory product, which the customers might want to experience the sensory attributes before any purchase. This applies in the case of color options and other body shape alternatives. When the merchandise offers more color options, the swatch of different color options provides more information for product choices available (Khakimdjanova and Park 2005, 314). Figure 6 shows a sample of color swatch of Veo's. This comes with great benefits as the perceived risk of the customers is reduced and their experience is enhanced. However, the feature was not available in nearly half percent of the product presentation. Only 12 percent of website offered the whole outfit display with different color options, and 28 percent showed only color swatches without try – on image. Some websites (19 percent) included both of the whole outfit of color options and color swatches. (Khakimdjanova and Park 2005, 314.)

According to Then and DeLong (1999, 67), the merchandise had better opportunities when size was not the crucial factor. In their study, research participants indicated that they preferred loose fitting outfit due to the inability to try the products. Websites nowadays offer size guide, which is the guide for the size of products to fit with customer's height, weight and measurements, and even the model measurements are included in the website. However, only general guided are posted and not the guide for each product,

which is understandable due to large amounts of information included. Size information about the product in images was not available in 22 percent of websites, and most websites only featured one-site fitting images (Khakimdjanova and Park 2005, 314). In Khakimdjanova and Park (2005, 314)'s research, most of the website only tried on the products on a model or a mannequin, which limits customer's visualization of the products. Therefore, they suggested the adding of alternative models with different body shapes in order to broaden customer's visualization of products on various body shapes. Only 4 percent of their studied websites included alternative body shapes of mannequin or model.

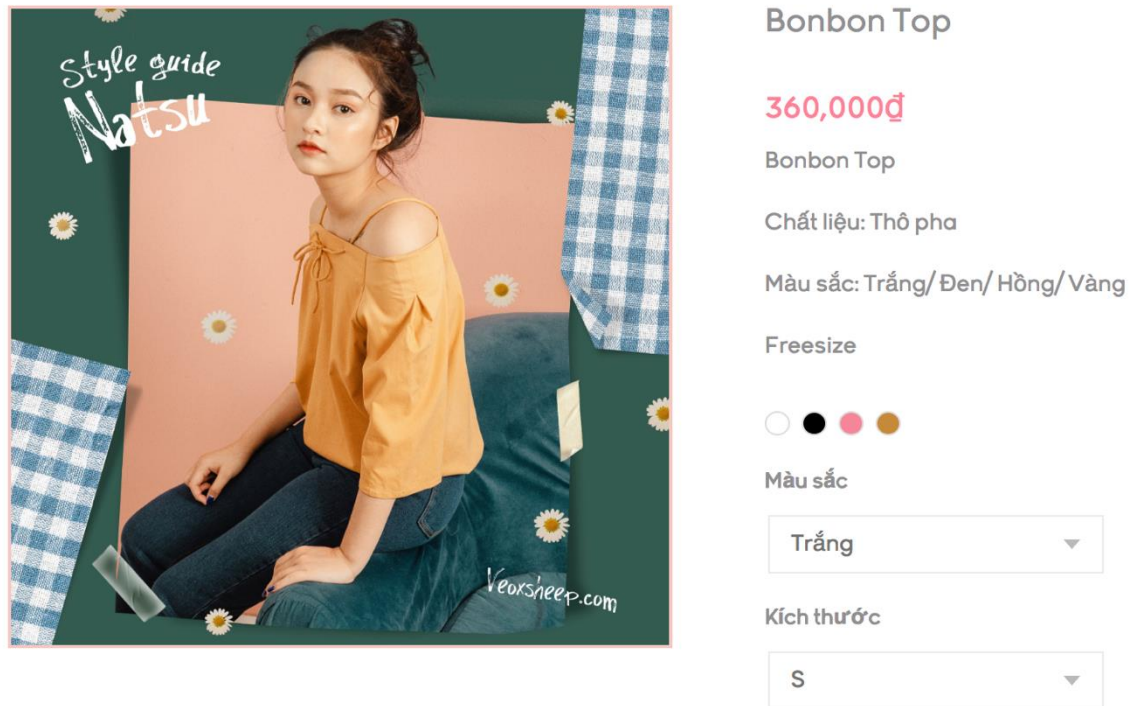


Figure 6: An example of color swatch (screenshot) – color swatch option is available right under the name and price of the product.

Focused item display

Work as well as the enlarged pictures of products, the focus item images could be essential motives of purchasing for customers. An image of focus details such as the seams, pockets or special details of the garment attracts the customer's attention. Close – up images offer more visual product information and reduce the risk of garment details (Ha & al. 2007, 487). The focused images unfortunately were only available in 23 percent of websites despite of their benefits (Khakimdjanova and Park 2005, 314).

2.2.2 Website environment

Ha & al. (2007, 478) pointed out that the characteristic of an environment, which in this case is the store, had effects on customers' internal stages and their behavior. Elements such as the images of merchandise, colors, fonts, background, music and more could have such effect. The effective behavior involves purchase intention, satisfaction, purchasing and patronage. In online visual merchandising, the website itself holds a significant task in creating the environment for the customers, replacing the brick – and – mortar stores. Site design is indicated as one of the most important elements driving shopper e-satisfaction (Szymanski & Hise 2000, 313). Lohse and Spiller (1999) compared the analogies of real stores and online stores as: store window displays and homepage; store atmosphere and store organization, interfere and graphic; store layout and the browse and search; number of floors and the hierarchical system of the store, stores entrances and online links and more. The atmosphere of physical stores divides the elements into ambient factors (music or sound, scent, lighting, temperature), design factors (functional and aesthetic factors) and social factors (salespeople's behavior) (Baker 1986; Oh, Fiorito, Cho & Hofacker 2008, 239). These elements are put into online visual merchandise context and discussed. The merchandise display is the part of the site environment, which has been discussed previously through the manner of presentation, the presentation technique and the supplementary presentation; therefore, this sub-chapter discusses only other elements of the websites.

Design factor

In web-based store, design factors have more influenced compared to ambient factors and social factors. The design factors are divided into two main factors functional (store layout, display) and aesthetic (color, design, style). (Oh & al. 2008, 240.) The home page of the website is compared to the window displays of brick-and-mortar stores (Lohse and Spiller 1999). The role of the homepage is similar to the window displays: creating the significant first impact of the store. The window displays give the consumers the general impression towards the stores and kinds of merchandise are on sale in the stores. Oh & al. (2008, 240) indicated that window displays attracted people outside to the products offered inside and created the shopping mood. The screen layout and design are believed to have close link to the web stores sales (Lohse and Spiller 1999).

The storefront of the website has the same function as the window display of the physical store, Oh & al. (2008, 240) suggested two types of storefront designs: thematic design (Figure 7) and non-thematic design. Thematic storefront design is to display the merchandise in a life style atmosphere, which might involve a story or a theme. The storefront, or

the home page, is the face of the whole website; sophisticated front page design might either gaining the customers' attention or driving them away (Geissler 2001, 493). Most of designer brands often use thematic front-page type to their websites, such as Guess, Armani Giorgio, Nike (Oh & al. 2008, 240). The second type of storefront design, non-thematic design, is often featured by specialty retail stores or discount stores such as Walmart. These websites generally show the brand names, images of the products and the product selections information. (Oh & al. 2008, 240.)

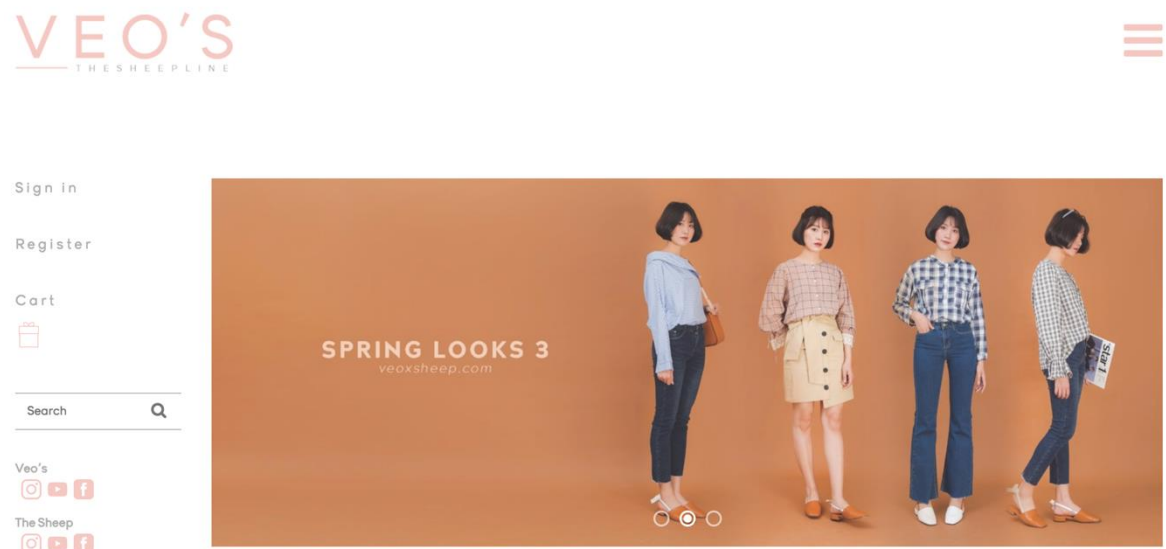


Figure 7: Thematic storefront of Veo's: Introducing the Spring Looks 3 (screenshot)

Other than the storefront design, the layout and design of the web could be acknowledged as the layout of the retail stores (Then & DeLong 1999, 67). The objective is to create the same environment of the website and the stores, making the comfortable of the browsing section for the customers. The layout which has advantages in clearness, navigation and aesthetic design can support the store atmosphere.

In each item, there is an information display that introduces the merchandise to the customers, which helps the customers save time and effort to get the good quality merchandise (Oh & al. 2008, 240). Information display involves two types: text-based information display and image-based information display (Oh & al. 2008, 240). The picture-based information is expected to give the customers the easiness to shop, reducing less risk from the merchandise they are likely to receive. In the information display, product image arrangement and number of pictorial images available without and with clicking are taken into consideration (Khakimdjanova and Park 2005, 314). Product images are possibly displayed on the right, left and center of the websites. In Khakimdjanova and Park (2005, 314)'s research, almost all websites displayed their product images on the top left corner

of the website. The extra images shown different views of the merchandise are displayed next to or under the large main images and could be navigated by clicking or tapping into. The number of images available is an important part of the layout, effecting the consumer's browsing experience. Almost all websites feature up to five products at first, and then offer to open from one to more than eight products after clicks. On the other hand, the text-based information such as name and information of the products are written next to or under the images, providing the customers with the rest of the information needed (Figure 8).



Figure 8: The combination of text-based information (right) and image-based information (left) (screenshot)

According to Oh & al.'s (2008, 247) research, a thematic storefront and image-based website gives the consumers the more safe and entertaining atmosphere than a non-thematic front page and text-based website; hence enhancing their purchasing experience on the web. However, the themes and images must fit into the choice of the target customers in order to receive the best result. Online merchandisers should take into consideration the use of pictures instead of text to develop the customer's experience.

Navigation and search engine

Most websites only present a limited number of images when first access, and require the customers to click the website for more or to turn to the new pages. The browsing into the hierarchical system of the website is similar to going to different floors of the physical stores (Lohse & Spiller 1999) and check each garment available. Merchandise categorization is available for customer's browsing. The browsing is enable by the sorting into categories on the web sites. According to Ha & al. (2007, 484), the categories are shown horizontally on menu bar; open on the screen horizontally or vertically when the cursor are

moved to the area, listed on the website vertically or presented in scroll-down menu. For example, Zara (2018) sorts their merchant into New in, Woman, TRF (Trafaluc), Man and Kids; other smaller categories such as dress, outerwear, jackets and more are accessible in further sub – categories.

The customers are likely encounter sitemap, which maps the structure of the websites to help customers browse merchandise. Sitemap is available in half of the websites. (Ha & al. 2007, 484). On the other hand, search engine is available for easier shopping. The search bars mostly available at the top of the website. Customers are able to search the desire items through keywords or brand names (in retail stores) without spending too much time on browsing the website. In the search results sites, the web offers consumers the alternatives to select the amounts of items displays per pages, or to filter the display by time or price, which enhances the shopping experience. Sitemaps and search engines are essential as they support the customer's search and help to find desired merchandise (Ha & al. 2007, 484).

Color

Color is an element which affect the human's personality function and psychopathology, emotions and behaviors (Valdez & Mehrabian 1994, 395). Therefore, color is believed to also have a significant effect on websites, an online based environment. Color psychology helps immediately create the mood of consumers, and each color gains different reaction from the customers, as indicated by Pegler (2012, 11). For example, red shows excite, love, sexy and power; yellow is bright, optimism and cheerful; green represents growing, coolness and aliveness; while blue is calm and comfortable (Pegler 2012, 11). Color stimuli is presented in terms of hue (name of colors), brightness or value (the hue's lightness or darkness) and saturation or intensity (the color's saturation or purity) (Valdez & Mehrabian 1994, 394; Diamond & Diamond 2011, 144).

The mixing of color requires planning and study to achieve harmonious. The color scheme is influenced by the color wheel (Figure 9), which is developed by three primary colors yellow, red and blue (Diamond & Diamond 2011, 145). The color scheme follows several rules of arrangements, following the color wheel: monochromatic, analogous, complementary, triad and neutral colors (Diamond & Diamond 2011, 145-149; Pegler 2012, 13-14):

- Monochromatic is the scheme developed by using one single color and develop the whole range of that one color. They perform a calm, control setting of merchandise, and a satisfying feeling of complete color scheme. An example of monochromatic is the use of light blue – navy blue – blue – dark blue and more.
- Analogous scheme is mixing colors that are next to each other on the wheel, they share similar pigment and characteristics that can work together to perform specific effect. Example of analogous colors are red-orange, yellow-green, blue-blue

violets and so on. They support one another to create an analogous scheme that is harmonious for the eye.

- Complementary scheme is the use of two colors on opposite sides of the wheel, for instant, blue – orange, red – green and vice versa. Oppose to the close harmony of analogous scheme, complementary offers the intensity and contrast of colors, which could be strong and vibrant. The scheme is youthful, bright and easy to gain attention; however, they can be irritating if not used wisely.
- Triad scheme is the combination of three colors which are equidistant from one another in the color wheel.
- Neutral color family involves black, white, brown, grey and beige. Black and white are not technically colors. Neutral family works well as a background for merchandise as they create an environment for the merchandise to have full impact. These colors do not compete with other colors, or disturb the customers but rather create a complimentary background. The use of neutral color as background is discussed further in the background section.

The use of colors is important, know how to use and combine them requires deeper study and practice. Understanding the use and mix of colors helps enhance the visual and the image of the store.

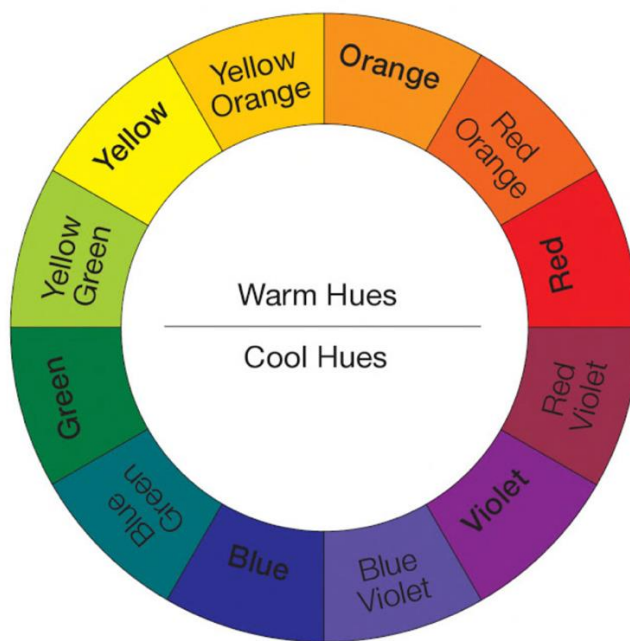


Figure 9: The basic color wheel (Sherin 2012, 18)

The psychology of colors is indicated through several aspects. The practice of warm and cool colors supports creating the environment for the shopper (Diamond & Diamond 2011, 151). Colors scientifically do not show coolness and warmth, but human associates the sensations got from the colors with the temperature. Cool colors are blue and green, warm colors are yellow, orange and red. The use of the hue in terms of given temperature feeling can introduce a similar environment for the customers. On the other hand, colors

are also categorized into advancing and receding colors, with red and orange as advancing colors, and green and blues as receding ones (Diamond & Diamond 2011, 151). The advancing counterparts give the feeling of nearer than the cool receding ones, in which merchants can use to generate a close or wide feeling.

The relationship between color and human emotions has been shown in previous studies, indicating that color has influence on the feeling and reaction of users (Bonnardel, Piolat & Bigot 2010, 70). Figure 10 indicates the color emotion guide, with each color represents a meaning. Previous study indicates that website color appeal supported website trust and satisfaction (Cyr, Head & Larios 2009, 14). Taken to the website contexts, blue and orange are the most appealing colors to both web designers and users. Moreover, color also has influence on the effect of layout, effecting the consumer's navigation, memorization and information retrieval. (Bonnardel & al. 2010, 78).



Figure 10: Color Emotion Guide (The Logo Company 2013)

Background music

Music has been considered as an element for moods triggering, hence creating atmospheric environment (Bruner 1990, 94). The positive feeling from music boosts the product evaluation (Kim, Kim & Lennon 2009, 7). Dubé, Chebat & Morin (1995, 314) proposed that music created pleasure and arousal feeling, improving the interaction of buyer and seller in traditional retail store. Therefore, adding the music in background might enhance the

shopping atmosphere and gain positive emotion. Using background music might evoke positive consumer response as the music helps provide a pleasing and arousal e-retailing atmosphere (Yoo & Kim 2012, 68). However, given the Internet context, there is no significant effect of music on emotion was found. The research by Kim & al. (2009, 15) suggested that this might result from the misfit of the music to the websites. Consequently, more research is still required to fully understand the influence of background music on websites.

Background

The background of the website mainly involves with the use of website color in consistence with the merchandise. As mentioned earlier, neutral color family (white, black, grey, beige and grey) is often used as background colors as the colors support the merchandises instead of compete with them. All white scheme is considered young, minimalism and high quality; however, it could bring a boring and bland atmosphere. The beige tone presents a pleasing, casual atmosphere and has been a designer's favorite. On the other hand, the grey tone is a popular setting for furs, silver and expensive gift wares, and now coming to bridal and designer areas (Pegler 2012, 14). According to Ha & al. (2007, 486), the most used background is white with dark colors text; white is also the common color to surround a product or use on an individual page.

Signage

In brick – and – mortar store, signage is an important part of sale and promotional period. The signage help gathers the attention of customers, informing them about the current or upcoming sale or promotion. Several usages of signage have been identified by Ha & al. (2007, 485): text menus, pop-up advertisement, linked static image advertisement, small advertisement slides, non-clickable picture advertisement. Text menus are some of the menu being changed into sale or promotion tabs. Pop-up advertisements are small tabs or windows open up to represent the signage (Figure 34). The small advertisement slides are automatic slides that follow the customers vertically or horizontally when browsing the web. There are also static pictures representing the signage that are clickable or non-clickable. (Ha & al. 2007, 485.)

2.2.3 Aesthetics of presentation

The practice of product presentation and website environment have been discussed previously, however, to complete the visual merchandising aspect, aesthetics of presentation is taken into consideration. Aesthetics is referred to as the philosophy of beauty, or as something that is beautiful and valid (Wang, Minor & Wei 2011, 46). Visually considered, both

products visual display and website design are essential for customer's online shopping experience. While on the Web, customer's perception of product quality is now evaluated by both product aesthetics and website aesthetics (Peng, Peak, Prybutok & Xu 2017, 190). In this section, the following elements are discussed: product aesthetics information and website aesthetics.

Product aesthetics

Product aesthetics is an important element in the retailing environment, which might shape the dimension of product quality. Product aesthetics information is considered the signals or cues received from the products about the product's characteristics (Peng & al. 2017, 190). Block, Brunel & Arnold (2003, 551) indicated that product aesthetics was the first element to connect with potential customers, as influenced by sensory experience. The visual aesthetics has several influences on the perception of customers: distinguish competitors and gather recognition; presenting how the product is developed through the innovation of the appearance; and presenting the customers and products relationship (Block & al. 2003, 551). Color appeal holds a crucial part of the product aesthetics, which was studied by Brady & Phillips (2003, 5).

Website aesthetics

On the other hand, in the e-retailing environment, the aesthetics of websites influence consumer's experience. The combination of color applications, products displays, complexity of display as elements of atmospheric cues are considered effective to shopper's cognitive and affective response (Wang, Hernandez & Minor 2010, 935). Schenkman and Jonsson (2000) suggested two dimensions of aesthetics: aesthetic formality and aesthetic appeal. With website aesthetics, the aesthetic formality is associated with the organization and order of the website; while the aesthetic appeal is related to the meaningfulness and novelty; for instant, aesthetic formality represent an organized environment and aesthetic appeal shows a creative and attractive environment (Wang & al. 2010, 367). The result of Wang & al. (2010, 940) presented that aesthetic formality influenced the speed and quality of shopper's information processing, hence effecting customer's cognitive perception; aesthetic appeal, on the other hand, manipulated the emotional response to the service of consumers. Wang & al. (2011, 940) also showed that aesthetic formality progressed negative impact on arousal, however, aesthetic appeal showed positive impact toward arousal.

2.2.4 Summary

Visual merchandising elements of apparel websites have been discussed and studied in this section. Online visual merchandising involves manner of presentation, website environment and aesthetics of presentation. All the elements and their categories are summarized and can be viewed in Figure. Browsing on the web is easy, moreover, it is also easy to switch between different websites. Therefore, capturing the customers' attention is essential in e-tailing practice. Literature about online visual merchandising is available but only in limited resources. Despite the critical benefit of visual merchandising, online visual merchandising has not gained much attention from sellers. However, in recent year, as e-commerce has developed drastically, elements of online visual merchandising are adapted by many e-merchants in the market. Figure 11 below summarizes the main theory of online visual merchandising.

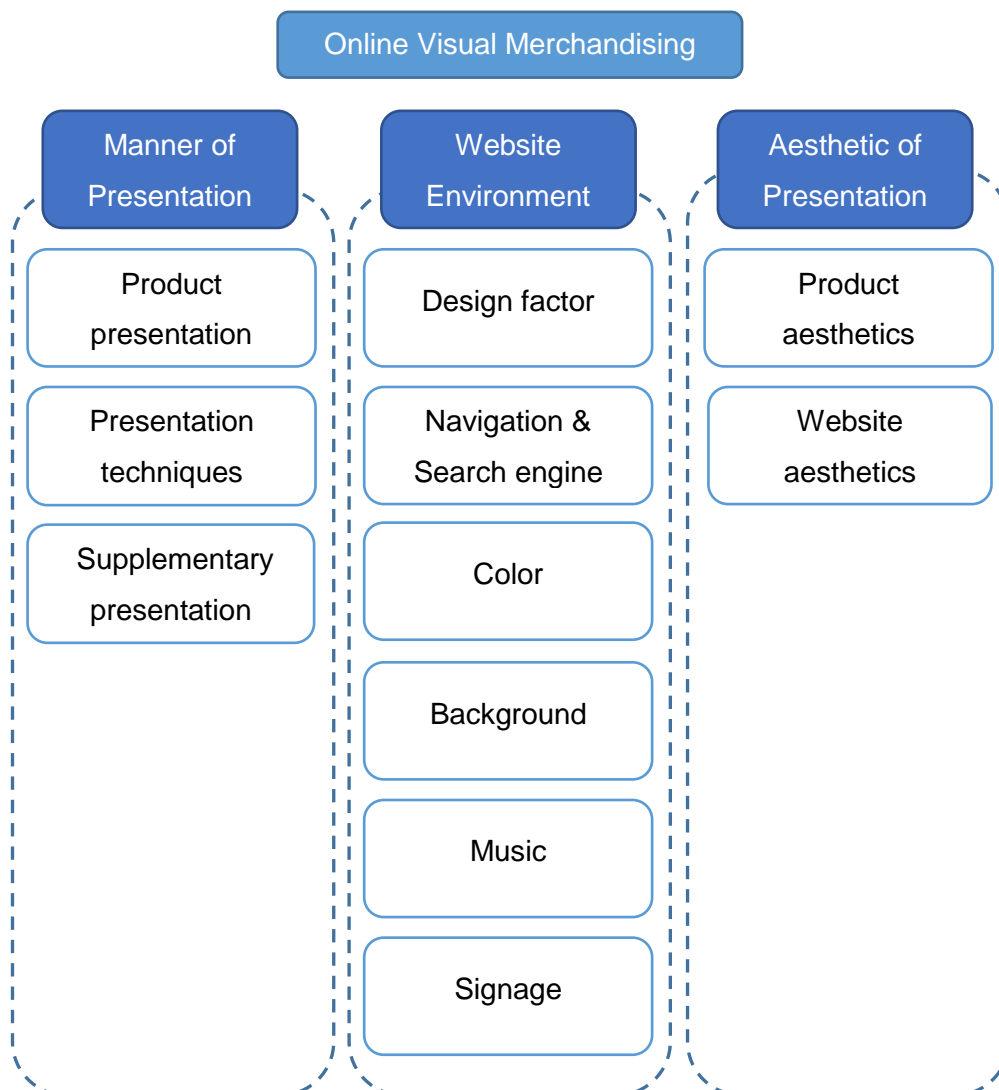


Figure 11: The summarized theory of online visual merchandising practice

2.3 Online visual merchandising and impulse buying

This section focuses mainly on the discussion of impulse buying, impulse buying in online environment and its relation toward online visual merchandising.

2.3.1 Impulse purchasing

Impulse purchase is the strong urge, sometimes irresistible, to purchase immediately (Rook 1987, 191). Previous research implemented that unintended or unplanned purchase was associated with impulse purchasing (Rook 1987, 191). However, Stern (1964, 59) suggested that the term was “accurate, but not very descriptive” as unplanned purchasing referring to purchases that were not planned in advance and it included impulse purchasing. The speed of buying decision occur is what distinguishes unplanned purchase and impulse purchase (Hausmann 2000, 404), as impulse purchase occurs in shorter time compared to unplanned purchase (Dawson & Kim 2009, 232). Moreover, impulse decision is made after exposed with the products (Hock & Loewenstein 1991, 496). Impulsive consumers are familiar with unexpected buying intentions and less thoughtful about their buying decision than other buyers (Dawson & Kim 2009, 232).

Stern (1964, 59) classified impulse purchase into four types: pure, reminder, suggestion and planned. Pure impulse buying is the pure true impulsive intention, which is the break to normal buying pattern. Reminder impulse buying is when the shopper encounters the items and are reminded about the low stock at home, or about an advertisement and recommendation about that product; this situation requires prior experience with the impulse products. Suggestion impulse purchase is when the consumers visualizes the need for a product on first encounter. An important factor distinguishing suggestion and reminder impulse behavior is that the consumer does not have previous experience with the products like in the reminder situation. Last but not least, planned impulse buying is the situation that the buyer enters the shop with the intention of making other purchases to meet with the promotion or coupon available. (Stern 1964, 59-60.)

Impulse purchase is triggered by different causes: person-related, environment related, product-related and situational (Dholakia 2000; Koski 2004, 26). Impulse buying is affected by both external and internal factors; internal factors listed are affect, mood or emotion, while external factors are environment, situation and atmosphere (Kim 2003, 15-18).

2.3.2 Impulse purchasing in online shopping

In online e-tailing context, several researchers have studied about the practice of impulse purchasing. Donthu and Garcia (1999) suggested that online consumers are more impulse than traditional consumers. About the features of website, product recommendation, items suggestion, price point sales and promotions are elements influencing impulse behavior (LaRose 2001).

Koski (2004, 29) pointed about five factors that encouraging impulse purchasing on the internet. The first is that the Web offer anonymity and privacy which can avoid the situation when the customers want to purchase items considered embarrassing, which enables the impulse buying (Koufaris 2002, 210; Rook & Fisher 1995, 312). Secondly, the click – and – mortar stores offer an easy access for customers to buy the products, which influences impulse buying (Burton 2002, 804; Koufaris 2002, 210). Shopping online is not limited to geographical location or opening hours, the shopping could take place 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year (Burton 2002, 804). On the other hand, Moe & Fader (2004) suggested it was costless to come to an online store, which likely made the consumers come to the store without any buying intention or made them delay the buying decision and return later to purchase. The variety of goods available is also influencing impulse purchasing. Great variety of goods leads to large information load, which potentially leads to impulse buying (Hwang 2000, 344). Moreover, marketing promotions and direct marketing are also important factors. Direct marketing and personalized marketing messages influence customers' intention, resulting in impulse action (Koufaris 2002, 210). Placing advertisement and promotion strategically through the stores can increase unplanned purchases and improve sales (Inman & al. 1990, 74). Lastly, the use of credit cards has an impact on impulse buying. The payment on the internet mostly involves non – cash payment. In this case, shoppers tend to overspend, as they do not experience actual spending with the online transaction process (Park & al. 2012, 3). The purchase process is also simple, by just a few clicks. Recently, the use of other payment technologies like online wallets (PayPal, Alipay) or Internet banking enable the payment process and make it easier and less time – consuming.

2.3.3 Impulse purchasing and online visual merchandising

Browsing in store is the combination of external and internal factors. The impulse purchase process is the result of the buyer's impulse buying behavior and the setting of retail, which involves interior and exterior display (Kim 2003, 19). Stern (1962, 60) gave the conceptualization that impulse buying was the response of shopper's exposure to the store

stimuli. The store stimuli serve as a support for shoppers who have no intentions of buying in the store, providing them with information and encouraging them to purchase some products (Kim 2003, 8). To clearly say, impulse buying behavior is the customer's response to their encounter with the store stimuli, which might provoke the buyer's desire and encourage them to make an impulse decision after enter the store. The store stimuli include visual merchandising can excite the desire and result in impulse buying. The more exposed to visual stimuli consumers are, the more likely they are to purchase on impulse (Mehta & Chugan 2013, 81). Previous studies have proven the relationship between visual merchandising elements and impulse purchase. Bhatti & Latif (2013, 13) pointed out the window display, floor merchandising, forum display and shop brand name influenced buyer's impulse buying. Another study by Mehta & Chugan (2013, 81) showed support as it proved the relationship between window display, floor merchandise, promotional signage and impulse behavior. However, the interaction to mannequin/form display only received moderate result. On the other hand, Stern (1962, 61) also suggested that store display was a factor of impulse purchase; as the buyer did not expect buying impulse products in the stores, the display was essential to increase the impulse opportunity.

Similar to traditional visual merchandising, the online visual merchandising is expected to have an undeniable relationship with impulse purchase, which is studied and researched in the empirical part of the thesis.

2.3.4 Summary

Impulse purchase is an unexpected, unplanned purchase that results from irresistible urge (Rook 1987, 191). The shoppers buying on impulse have no intention of purchasing any specific products when entering the stores. In online environment, impulse purchase is influenced by various factors, which are anonymity and privacy, easy access, less cost, marketing and direct marketing and the use of credit card (Koski 2004, 29). The process of impulse buying starts after consumers are exposed with products (Hock & Loewenstein 1991, 232), then are encountered with various store stimuli, which encourages their desire toward the products and leads to product decision (Kim 2003, 8). Visual merchandising is suggested as a store stimulus by Kim (2003, 19). Online visual merchandising is considered to serve as a stimulus of online impulse buying and influence the impulse process.

3 Research Method

The following chapter introduces the method involved with the research. This indicates the objective of the research, introduction of method, sample recruitment, questionnaire survey development, data collection, data analysis and limitations.

3.1 Objective

Online visual merchandising is suggested to have a relationship with impulse buying behavior. Previous discussions have pointed out elements and factors of online visual merchandising and impulse purchasing. The objective of the research is to study **the influence of online visual merchandising on impulse purchasing**, which is Investigate Question 2.

The case company Veo's recently publishes their first apparel retail websites. The website serves as the store environment in place of the brick – and – mortar store. However, they are eager to study what elements of online visual merchandising influence impulse purchasing behavior of customers.

Kim (2003, 22) suggested that research on situational influenced could be studied by researching the relationship between consumers' characteristics and the retailing feature. In this research, the shopper's impulse buying behavior is considered the consumers' characteristic, while elements of online visual merchandising are served as the external cues to the impulse buying process. As the result, several small objectives were developed to study the relationship of consumer's impulse buying and online visual purchasing elements: manner of presentation, website environment and aesthetics of presentation. The elements of online visual merchandising and impulse buying behavior were determined to be studied variables:

- The influence of manner of presentation on impulse buying behavior.
- The influence of website environment on impulse buying behavior.
- The influence of aesthetics of presentation on impulse buying behavior.

3.2 Method

The quantitative method was chosen to be the research method of the thesis. The quantitative method was chosen as it focused on a large amount of audiences, who represented different consumer groups and to show their behavior towards the impulse buying decision. Survey was the chosen form of data collection. Burns and Bush (2014, 172) indicates the

advantages of surveys as standardization, easy administration, ability to get beneath the surface, easy to statistically analyze and reveal of subgroup differences.

The research was carried out as online surveys on Webropol. According to Franses & Paap (2001, 10), the quantitative research goal is to summarize the data to finalize the decision on specific marketing variables, which in this case the final result would be a decision on the choice of online visual merchandising strategy. Through the data gathered and analyzed, better online visual merchandising strategy choice will be made.

3.3 Sample recruitment

The informants of the survey were consumers who had Internet experience and experience with online purchasing. The target customers of the brand Veo's are customers aged 18-30, or under 18 and 31-40 if applicable; therefore, the main focus ages would be 18-30. On the other hand, Veo's focuses on women's apparel. Study by Williams & David (1972) pointed out the woman were the major customers of soft goods like apparel and household textile. Therefore, gender limitation was not considered as a negative factor for the research.

3.4 Questionnaire design

Evaluating metrics

Traditionally, the questions should be measured by the five-point Likert scale, which is a famous used customer feedback metrics. However, study by Lemon and Verhoef (2016, 81) showed that these metrics were not able to capture the full customer experience, therefore the use of simpler metrics were preferred by firms. As the result, the main scale for analysis was changed into the three-point scale and it was evaluated as Unsatisfying (1), Neutral (2) and Satisfying (3).

However, through respondents' feedback, the scale should have been Disagree (1), Neutral (2) and Agree (3) as all the questions were statements. Some respondents found the survey difficult to answer as they did not understand the context of satisfying and unsatisfying in this case. The scale could not be altered as the response received already exceed 200 responses. Nevertheless, the respondents did understand the scale as Disagree (1), Neutral (2) and Agree (3) as the response result showed large amount of Satisfying and Unsatisfying choice instead of Neutral.

Impulse buying section

In the study, impulse buying behavior was the first discussed element. Adapted from Kim (2003, 24)'s research, five questions about impulse buying intention were included in the beginning of the questionnaire (Table 5; Section 1). The survey questions of Kim (2003, 24) were significantly thoughtful and understandable and the author of the thesis would use the same question as Kim. Kim (2003, 24) developed the questions from various studies of impulse purchasing (Rook & Hoch 1985; Han 1987; Weun & al. 1997; Beatty & Ferrel 1998; Youn & Faber 2000). These questions were evaluated by three-point scale Unsatisfying (1), Neutral (2) and Satisfying (3).

Table 5: Developed empirical support for the questionnaire

Questionnaire	Empirical support
Section 1: Impulse Buying 1. I go shopping to change my mood. 2. I feel a sense of excitement when I make an impulse purchase. 3. After I make an impulse purchase I feel regret. 4. I have difficulty controlling my urge to buy when I see a good offer. 5. When I see a good deal, I tend to buy more than that I intended to buy.	Adapted from Kim (2003). (Rook & Hoch, 1985; Han, 1987; Weun & al., 1997; Beatty & Ferrel, 1998 Youn & Faber, 2000).
Section 2: Manner of Presentation Product Presentation 6. I get an idea of what I want to buy after looking through the product displays. 7. When I see clothing featuring a new style or design on display, I tend to buy it. 8. I tend to rely on store displays when I make a decision to purchase clothing. 9. When I see clothing that I like on mannequin display, I tend to buy it. 10. When I see clothing that I like on human model display, I tend to buy it. 11. When I see clothing that I like on hanger display, I tend to buy it. 12. When I see clothing that I like on flat-lay display, I tend to buy it.	Kim 2003 (6-8); Then & DeLong 1999; Pegler 2012; Diamond & Diamond 2011 (9-12).
Presentation Techniques Product stimulation 13. When I see products in 2D display, I tend to buy. 14. When I see products in 3D display, I tend to buy. 15. When I see products in video display, I tend to buy. Whole view 16. When I see products are shown in whole view, I tend to buy.	Khakimdjanova and Park 2005 (13-14, 16); Adelaar & al. 2003 (15); Yoo & Kim 2016 (17); Park 2012 (18); Yantis and Jonides 1984 (19).

<p>Coordinated product view</p> <p>17. When I see the products are mix and match with other products, I tend to buy.</p> <p>Enlargement</p> <p>18. When the display can be enlarged, I tend to buy.</p> <p>Movement</p> <p>19. When I see movement (displayed image moves constantly), I tend to check the product</p>	
<p>Supplementary Presentation</p> <p>Information</p> <p>20. When I see products has large amount of written information, I tend to buy.</p> <p>Coordinated; in conjunction</p> <p>21. I tend to check the products suggested to mix with the current product.</p> <p>22. I tend to check the products similar to the current product suggested below.</p> <p>Color option & body shape</p> <p>23. When I see products has color swatch (different color try-on), I tend to buy.</p> <p>24. When I see products are displayed on body shapes similar to mine, I tend to buy.</p> <p>Focused display</p> <p>25. When I see products has detailed focus photos, I tend to buy it.</p>	<p>Then & DeLong 1999; Szymanski & Hise 2000 (20); Then & DeLong 1999 (21-22, 24); Khakimdjanova & Park 2005 (23); Ha & al. 2007 (25).</p>
<p>Section 3: Website Environment</p> <p>Design</p> <p>26. I tend to browse a store when I am attracted by an interesting, eye-catching front page.</p> <p>27. The layout of the websites affects my browsing section.</p> <p>Browse, navigation & search engine</p> <p>28. When I see clothing that catches my eye I tend to click on it immediately.</p> <p>29. When I navigate and browse the web, I tend to look through all clothing sections.</p> <p>30. I tend to buy products that I search for in the search engine.</p> <p>31. I tend to check other products in the search result.</p> <p>Color</p> <p>32. When a website has color theme match my preference, I tend to browse more.</p> <p>Background</p> <p>33. When a website has good background, I tend to browse the web more.</p> <p>Music</p> <p>34. When a website has background music, I tend to browse the web more.</p> <p>Signage</p>	<p>Rook & Fisher 1995 Gudonaviciene & Alijosiene 2015; (26-27); Ha & al. 2007 (28-31); Diamond & Diamond 2011 (32); Ha & al. 2007 (33); Yoo & Kim 2012 (34); Kim 2003 (35-38).</p>

35. If I see an interesting promotional offer (reduced price, sales promotion, and etc.) on the web, I tend to buy. 36. Sale/clearance signs excite me to look through the clothing. 37. When I see a special promotion sign, I go to look at that clothing. 38. I am more likely to make an unintended purchase if the clothing has a sale or clearance sign.	
Section 4: Aesthetics Product aesthetics 39. When the product is displayed matching my aesthetics, I tend to buy it. Web aesthetics 40. When the website design matched my aesthetics, I tend to browse the web more.	Peng & al. 2017 (39-40)

Online visual merchandising section

The main study section of the research involved three main elements of online visual merchandising: (a) Manner of presentation, (b) Web environment and (c) Product aesthetics. The research studied how the three elements of online visual merchandising influenced the impulse purchase of consumers. Different questions were developed for each variable and evaluated by three-point scale Unsatisfying (1), Neutral (2) and Satisfying (3).

The first element was the impact of manner of presentation on impulse purchasing. In manner of presentation, seven questions were developed for product presentation, seven questions for presentation techniques and six questions for supplementary presentation (Table 5; Section 2).

For product presentation, question 6 to 8 were adapted from Kim (2003, 24)'s questions about the influence of in-store form and mannequin display on impulse buying, which were based on studies by Han (1987). Question 9 to 12 were developed to measure the effective of a specific type of product presentation: mannequin/ human model/ hanger/ flat-lay, and they were based on studies of Then & DeLong (1999, 67), Pegler (2012, 103) and Diamond & Diamond (2011, 89-91).

For presentation techniques, question 13 to 15 focused on product stimulation. Question 13, 14 and 16 were based on Khakimdjanova and Park (2005, 313), question 15 was suggested by Adelaar & al. (2003). Question 17 was based on Yoo & Kim (2016, 68)'s coordinated product view suggestion. Study by Park (2012, 27) influenced question 18 and study by Yantis and Jonides (1984, 601) supported question 19.

For supplementary presentation, individual questions were developed for each aspect of supplementary presentation. Question 20 about information presentation was supported by Then & DeLong (1999, 67) and Szymanski & Hise (2000, 319). Then & DeLong (1999, 67)'s study also helped develop coordinated outfit and similar items suggestion question (Question 21 and 22) and also body shape alternatives question (Question 24). Color option (Question 23) was supported by Khakimdjanova & Park (2005, 314). Question 25 about focused display was based on Ha & al. (2007, 487)'s study.

The second element was the website environment, and fourteen questions were developed (Table 5; Section 3). Question 26 and 27 were based on study by Rook and Fisher (1995) and Gudonaviciene and Alijosiene (2015), which concerned about the design of the website. Ha & al (2007, 484) supported the browsing, navigation and search engine in Question 28 to 31; and supported background color in question 33. Question 32 about color was based on Diamond & Diamond (2011, 150)'s theory. The question about background music was based on Yoo & Kim (2012, 68)'s study (Question 34). As promotion signage in physical store and in online store are in different forms but still have the same effects, questions about signage in Kim (2003, 24)'s study were adapted in question 35 to 38. The questions were based on Rook & Hoch (1985); Han (1987); Weun, Jones, & Betty (1997); Beatty & Ferrel (1998); Youn & Faber (2000).

The last element was aesthetics of presentation and two questions were adapted to support the variable (Table; Section 4). Question 39 involved with product aesthetics and question 40 concerned website aesthetics. Both questions were developed based on Peng & al. (2017, 190)'s study.

Based on the empirical supports, the final questionnaire survey was finalized (Appendix 1). The questionnaire was developed and tested on several respondents before published. The wording of the questionnaire aimed to be clear, simple to understand and brief (Burns & Bush 2014, 217). The layout of the survey was following the literature studied in the previous chapter.

3.5 Data collection

The survey questionnaire (Appendix 1) was created through the questionnaire design process and created on Webropol. The computer – assisted surveys have several advantages, which are speed, error – free interviews, the use of different medias (pictures, videos and graphics) and quick capture of data (Burns & Bush 2014, 177). The surveys

were sent out through various online channels: social media sites and emails. The questionnaire survey had three pages when displayed online, the first page was demographic question, the second page focused on manner of presentation, the last page was about website environment and aesthetics of presentation. It took approximately 5-8 minutes to complete the survey online.

The questionnaires received 253 responses. The responses rate was 75.52 percent with all the responses were usable.

3.6 Data analysis

The survey's responses were exported from Webropol and imported as a dataset. The dataset was then processed through analysis. Descriptive analysis was used in the statistical analysis. The results and details are discussed in the next chapter.

3.7 Study limitation

There are several limitations toward the study:

- The point scale was quite narrow. Even though the author had explained about the unnecessary of complicated metrics systems, the three-scale metric might have limitation toward the study.
- The metric of the study should have been Disagree (1), Neutral (2) and Agree (3) as all the questionnaires were written as statements. However, the respondents did understand the scale as Disagree (1), Neutral (2) and Agree (3) based on the response result.
- The knowledge of online visual merchandising was considered new towards consumers, therefore some of the elements might be difficult to understand.
- Quantitative method might create limitation towards the study. The consumers might not aware their behavior as impulse and therefore might not be able to assess their behavior correctly.

3.8 Summary

The chapter shows the objective of the research, introduction of method used, sample recruitment, questionnaire survey development, data collection and analysis and limitations. The research was to study the influence of each element of online visual merchandising had on impulse buying. The questionnaire was developed based on other previous studies available. The surveys were conducted on Webropol and contributed on different online channels. There were 253 responses and the response rate was 75.52 percent with all responses usable.

4 Results

The chapter presents the results of the research. The demographic of respondents is introduced. Consumer's impulse buying behavior is examined and the influence of each elements of online visual merchandising is analyzed.

4.1 Introduction to the respondents

The demographic of respondents is explained in this sub-chapter. The online surveys gathered 253 responses of Internet users. The majority of the respondents were female (88%). Nearly half of the respondents (47%) were in the age range of 18-24. The brand Veo's main target customers, who were from 18-30 years old, took part as 55%. The different age groups could be seen in Figure 12. The age groups were divided to mainly focus on the brand's target customers group. The age groups determined different customers buying behavior depending on their living status, social status, shopping habit, power of purchase and so on. Figure 12 shows the age demographic of the research respondent.

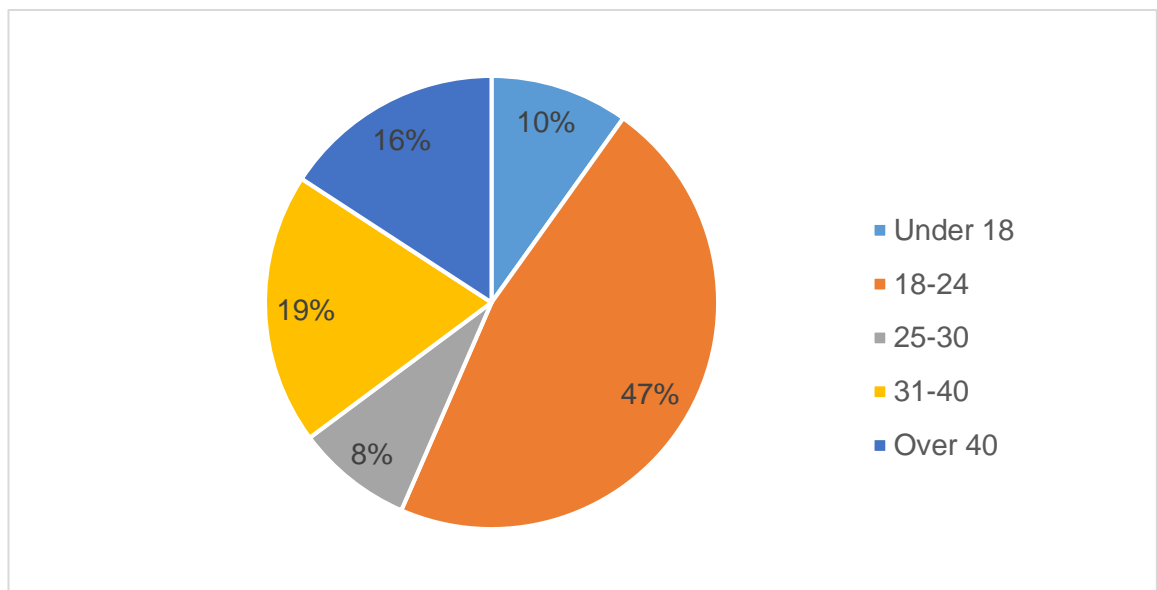


Figure 12: Age distribution of respondents

Figure 13 shows different employment status of respondents. Full-time working respondents made the largest percent in the research (46%), students took the second largest with 38 percent. Part-time workers were 8 percent and unemployed respondents were 3 percent. The employment status might have an effect on respondents' impulse buying as wages and salaries are different. The survey did not question respondents about their

monthly salary due to the fact that the study did not limit into any geographic region. Different geographic regions have different living standards and pricing; therefore, it would be difficult to evaluate when the survey might have got responses from various regions.

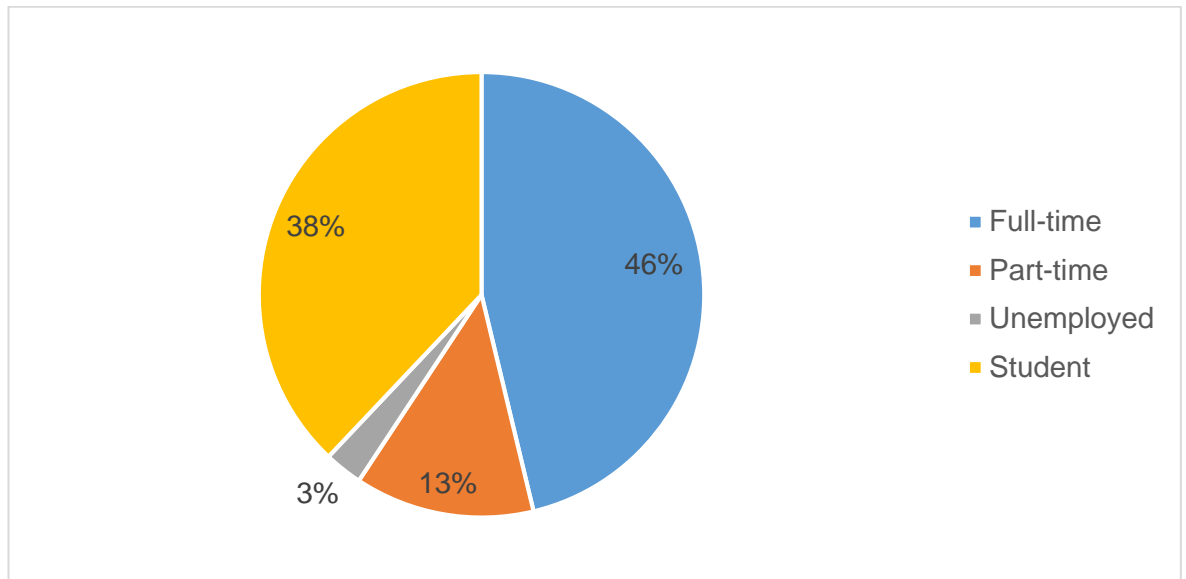


Figure 13: Employment status of respondents

The majority of respondents considered themselves as experienced (42%) and very experienced (26%) in Internet experience. Only 7 percent of respondents were inexperienced and very inexperienced (Figure 14). On the other hand, 94 percent of respondents had experience in online purchasing.

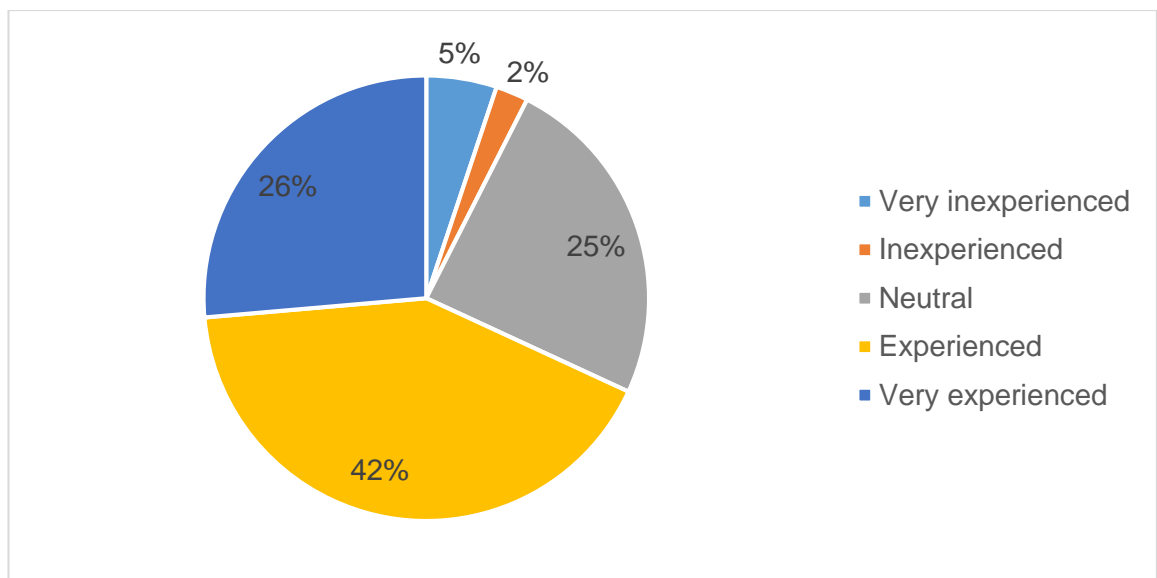


Figure 14: Internet experience of respondents

To summarize, the respondents of the survey were mainly female, had diverse age groups but the main age groups (18-24, 24-30) took more than half of the respondents. The majority of them were full-time workers and students. They were experienced with Internet and almost all of them had experience with online purchasing.

4.2 The influence of online visual merchandising on impulse purchasing

The total result shows that online visual merchandising has positive influences on impulse buying. The main part of the questionnaire was to evaluate the influence of each online visual merchandising elements on impulse buying behavior of consumers. The elements are discussed first and the grand result is discussed in latter part. Following the structures of the questionnaire that supports each statement, the author investigates in the results.

4.2.1 Impulse buying behavior

The first section of questionnaire was set to determine respondents' impulse buying behavior. Various statements about impulse buying behavior were stated in the questionnaire and all received above neutral to satisfying scale (Figure 15). Especially, respondents were intended to buying on impulse when they saw a good deal. Impulse purchase excited their mood. Shopping activity in general also helped change respondents' mood. The respondents found it hard to control the urge of impulse buying, which supported Rook (1987, 191)'s definition of impulse buying as the strong urge, sometimes irresistible. Last but not least, respondents felt neutral about regret after an impulse purchase, which led to that the post-purchase experience of impulse buying varied between cases. On the other hand, impulse buying behavior was quite similar in between age groups, employment status groups and gender groups.

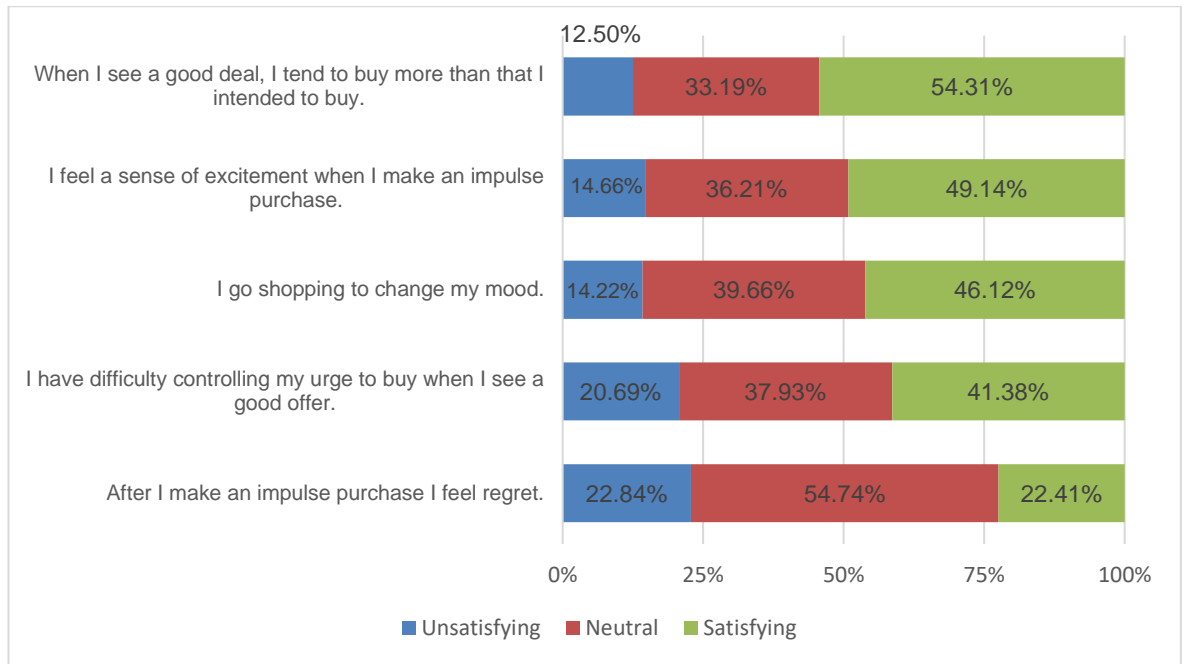


Figure 15: Respondent's evaluation on impulse buying behavior

As the main target customer of the brand Veo's is the age range 18-30, Figure 16 was created to examine the impulse behavior of these two age groups specifically. Similar to previous findings, the two age groups had nearly the same result. However, in the age group 25-30, respondents were likely not to regret when making an impulse purchase (1.71); while the average mean of age group 18-24 was 2. The age group 25-30 indicated that when they saw a good dead, they tended to buy more (2,71) and had difficult controlling their urge.

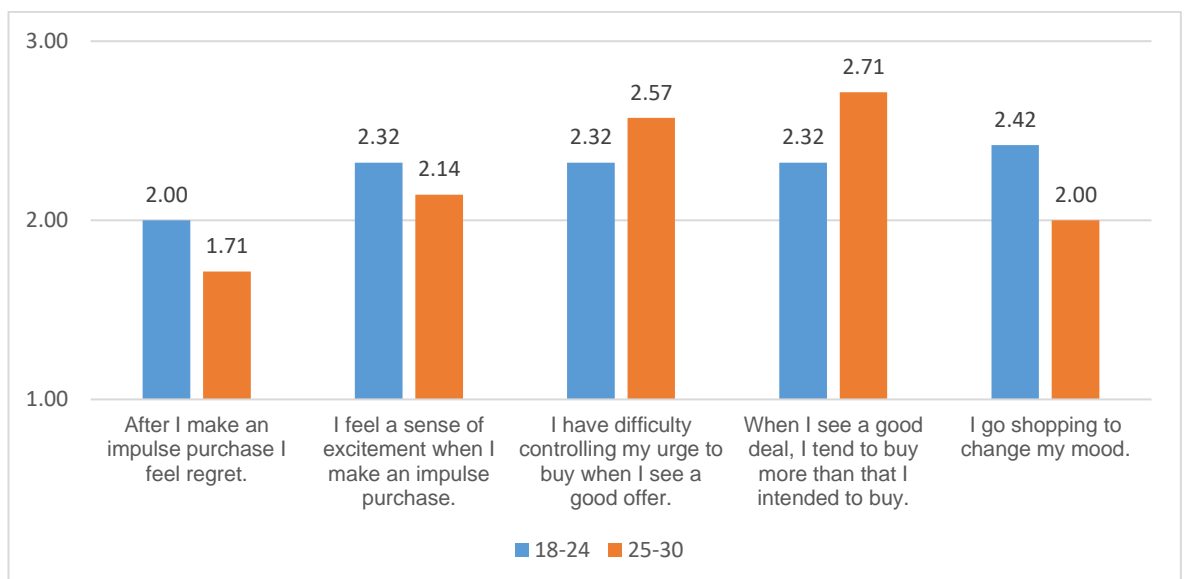


Figure 16: The mean of impulse purchase behavior for age groups 18-24 and 25-30

4.2.2 Manner of presentation

Product presentation

Responses showed that product displays helped respondents get the idea of the merchandise (Figure 17). Respondents showed that they did depend on store displays when making the purchase, however, it was not a significant amount (33.2%). On the other hand, new style and design on display did not entirely support the buying intention of respondents as only 23% agree with the statement.

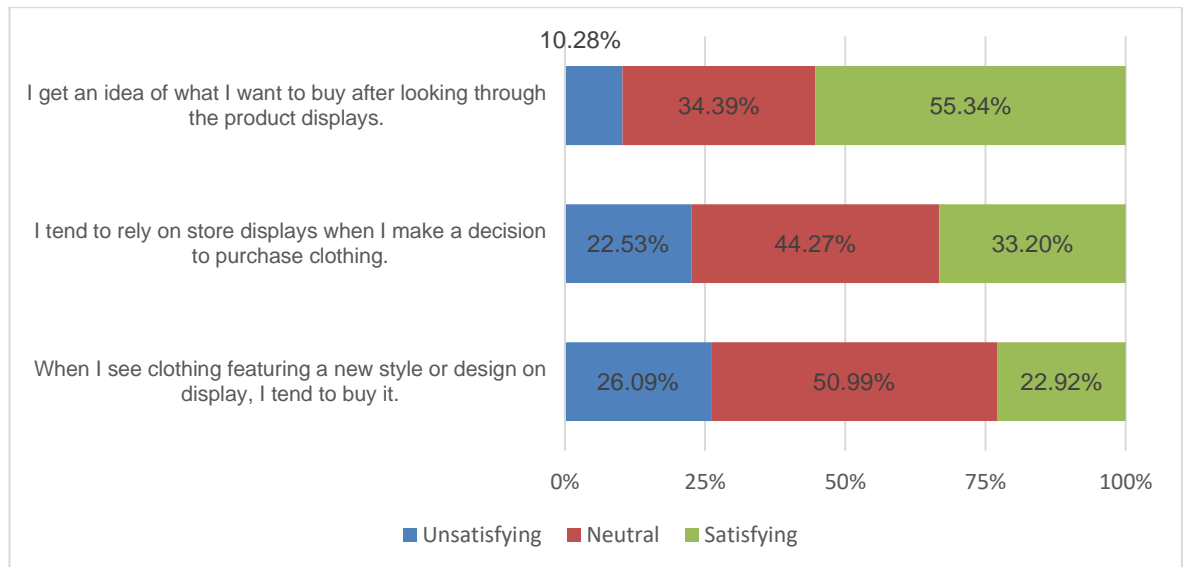


Figure 17: Respondent's evaluation on product presentation displays

Respondents preferred human model display out of the four main options with 45.85% agree. This supported Then and DeLong (1999, 67)'s study as the majority of consumers prefer realistic human model. Hangers display also received positive support, but not that significant. This might result from the reason that consumers are able to see everything of the garment on hanger (Kerfoot & al. 2003, 148). However, mannequin and flat-lay displays received negative agreement from respondents (Figure 18). In traditional visual merchandising, mannequins are one of the central elements of in – store display (Diamond & Diamond 2011, 88). On the online shopping environment, mannequins seem to fail to capture the interest of consumers. Even though hangers and flat-lay presentation share the same disadvantages that limit of the view of the garment and the view of the final look on the body (Khakimdjanova and Park 2005, 313), hangers were more preferable than flat-lay presentation.

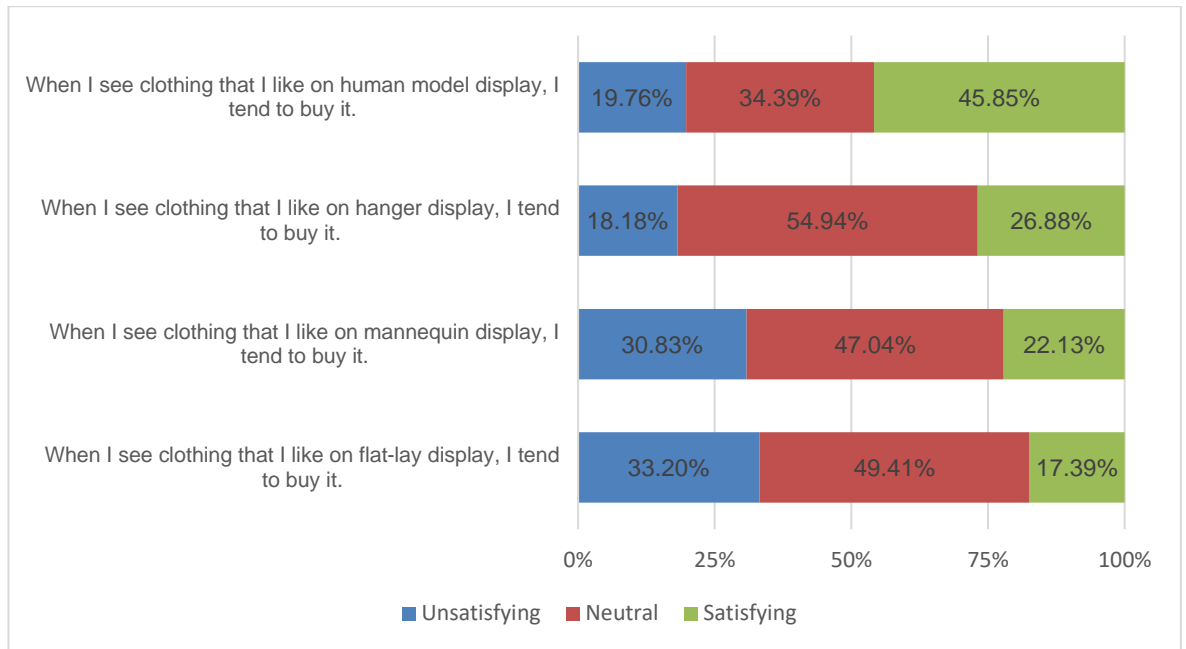


Figure 18: Respondent's evaluation on product presentation on mannequin/human model/hanger/flat-lay.

Presentation technique

Out of all product stimulation techniques, customers preferred videos (39.92%) than three-dimensional display (26.09%) and two-dimensional display (14.62%), as shown in Figure 19. These results are amusing as the majority of websites only offer only two-dimensional display (Khakimdjanova and Park 2005, 313). Moreover, three-dimensional display is rarely found in website. Videos usage preference supports Adelaar & al. (2003)'s research. The recent trend of videos is taking over the Internet and more websites now adopt this new media into their business.

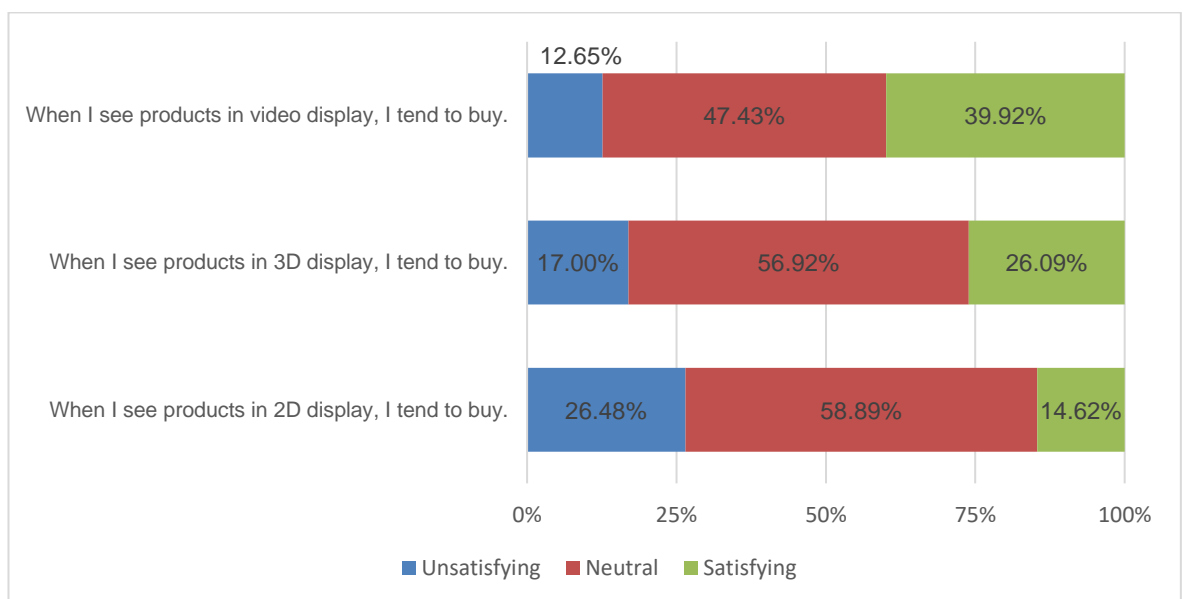


Figure 19: Respondent's evaluation on product stimulation techniques

The respondents showed great supports toward coordinated product views as 61.26 per cent satisfying with the statement (Figure 20). The result supports Yoo & Kim (2012, 67)'s study that customers are believed to experience positive stages while viewing coordinated outfit. Coordinated product views aid consumers in product selection. They also prefer to have the products shown in whole view (57.31%), which helps them see the set coordination. The movement within the displays has successful captured the respondents' attention and encouraged them to check the product (41.11%); which supports the study of Yantis & Jonides (1984, 601) that the visual system is sensitive to flicker and movement, hence gathering customer's attention. Last but not least, the statement about enlargement gathered both neutral and satisfying agreement. However, the mean of the statement is still above neutral.

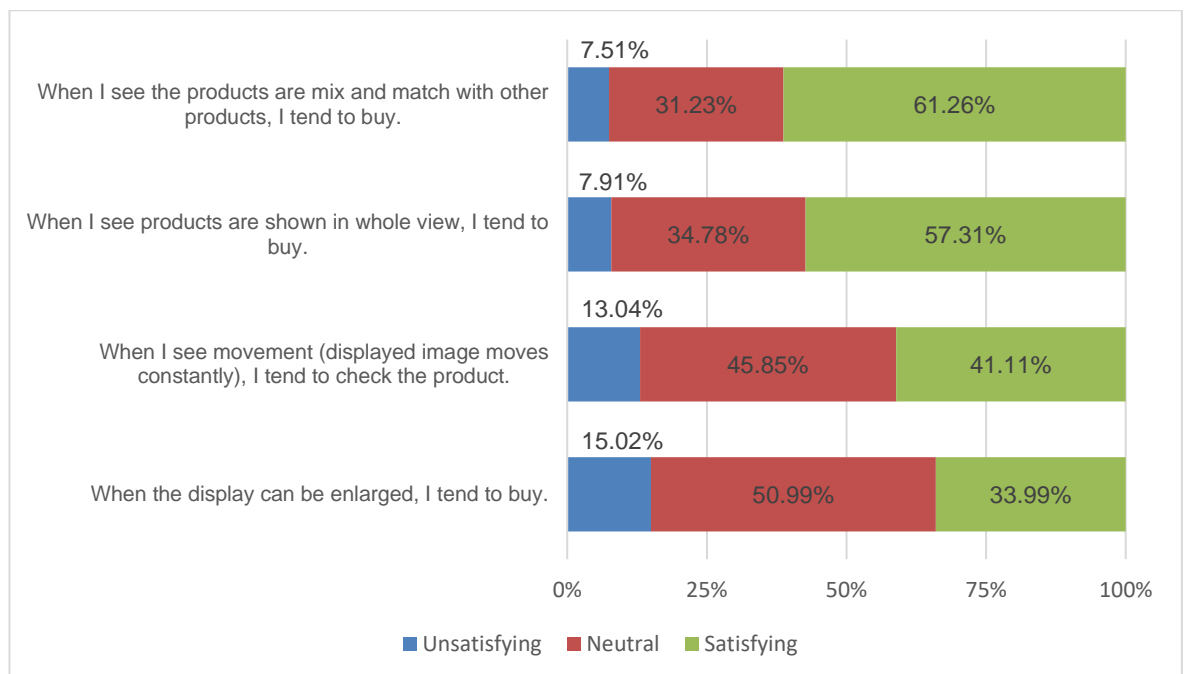


Figure 20: Respondent's evaluation on other presentation techniques

Supplementary presentation

Almost all of the supplementary presentation statements received satisfying support (Figure 21). The respondents preferred the most to have different body shape alternatives (64.03%). Fitting is an important factor that may limit online purchase of apparel as consumers are unable to try the merchandise. Then & DeLong (1999, 67) showed that the merchandise gained more opportunity when size was not the key factor. Therefore, having the same body shapes as the consumer's may gain more opportunity for the merchandise. When the products had detailed images (51.38%) and color swatches (43.48%), the respondents tended to purchase, as both presentation supports the visual appearance of

the products. On the other hand, the respondents were likely to check similar products suggestion (52.96%) and suggested coordinated items (48.22%), which supports previous study that consumers were positive to see similar items suggested shown to current items (Then and DeLong 1999, 67). However, written information gathered neutral support from the respondents (28.85%). Shoppers was studied to be more interested in purchasing if more perceived information was gained. The result showed that written information did not significantly influence the purchase intentions. Image-based information might be more preferable by customers.

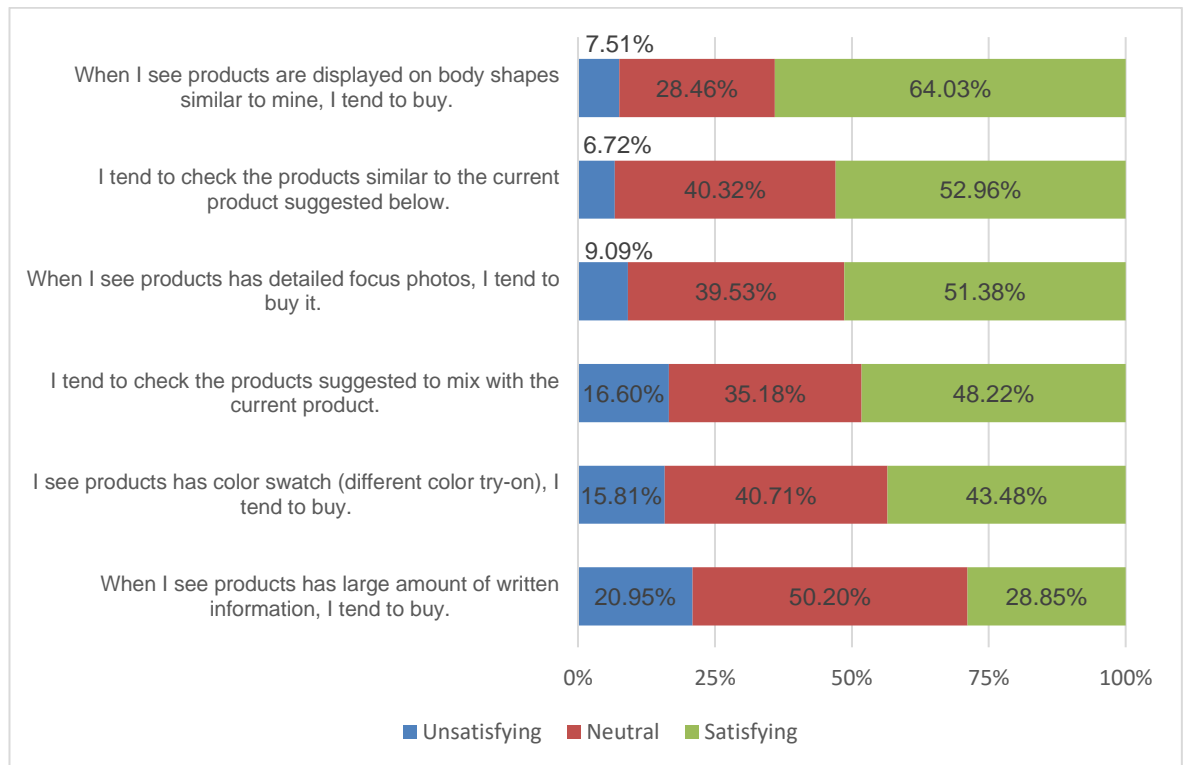


Figure 21: Respondent's evaluation on supplementary presentation

To summarize, the respondents tended to see through the display before getting any idea of purchases. They also mostly preferred human model display, and videos form of product stimulation. They encouraged products to be mix – and – match, and to be displayed in whole view. They were likely to purchase when the model body shapes were similar to theirs. Moreover, they were likely to check the suggested similar items and coordinated items.

4.2.3 Website environment

Design, Color, Background and Music

Nearly all statements received positive support (Figure 22). The respondents were likely to browse the website more when the website had an interesting front page or store front (72.33%); or a good background (68.38%) and a matched-to-preference color theme (61.26%). The layout of the website also greatly affected their browsing section, therefore this matter needed to be focus on. As indicated by Then and DeLong (1999, 67), the website layout is treated as the physical store layout. However, the majority of respondents did not prefer the background music, which matched with Kim & al. (2009)'s research that music had no significant impact on customer's online buying intention. This finding contradicts to the music in physical store's environment, as in physical environment, positive feeling from music boost the evaluation of product (Kim & al. 2009).

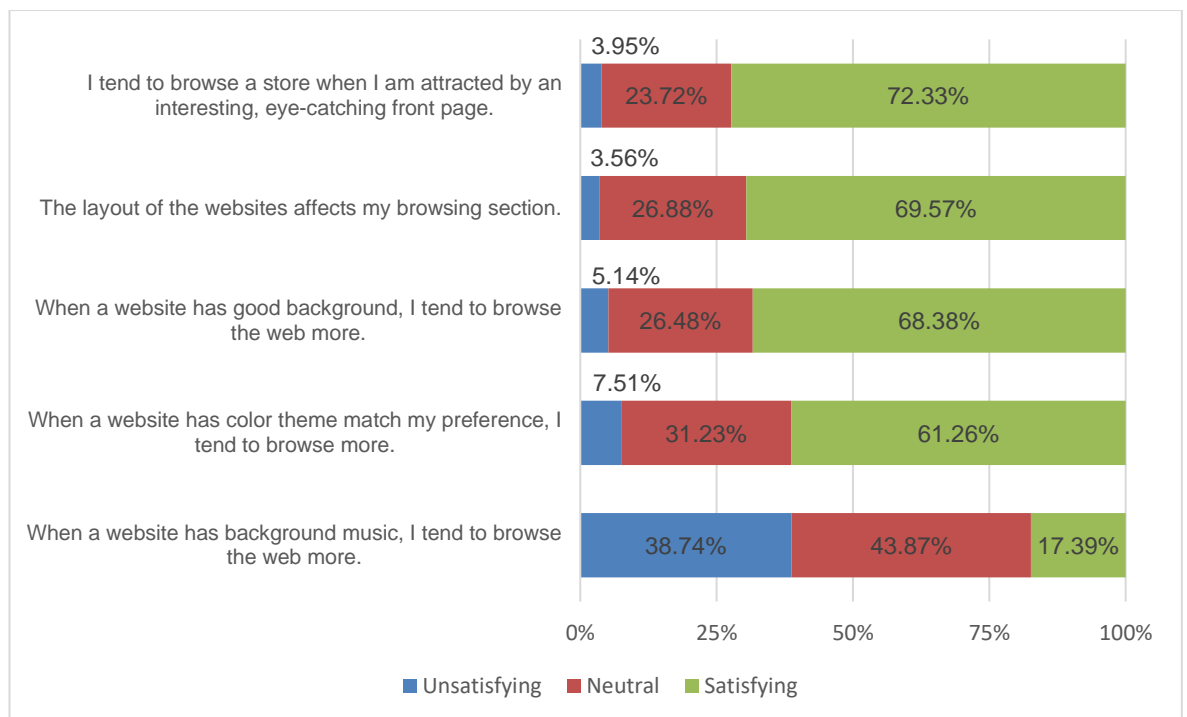


Figure 22: Respondent's evaluation on website design elements

The browsing section on website is important, therefore enhancing the browsing section of customers is priority. The experience of customers when browsing, navigating and using search engine were shown in Figure 23. When browsing, respondents checked the items that caught their attention immediately (75.49%). They also tended to check other products in the search result, although the amount was not greatly significant. The same situation applied to the situation of looking through all sections and buying products in the search engine. Sitemaps and menu bars may assist customers in navigating but customers are not likely to see through all sections.

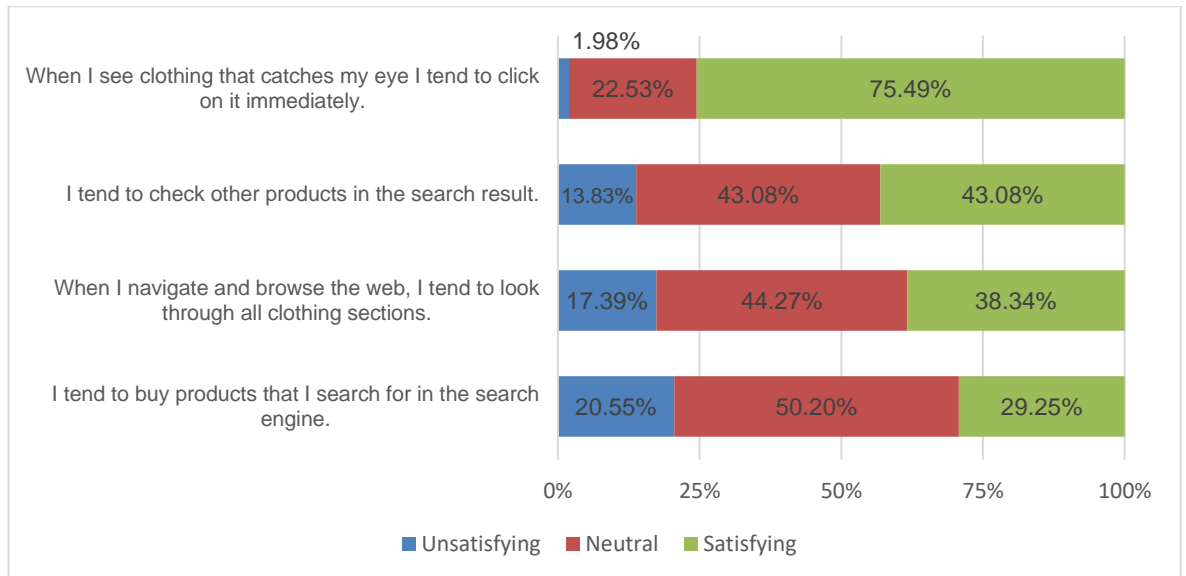


Figure 23: Respondent's evaluation on website browse, navigation and search engine

The promotion signage section received a large amount of satisfying results, as indicated in Figure 24. Promotion signage excited the respondents to look at that product (66.40%), or look through the clothing (62.45%). They tended to purchase of there were good offers available (63.24%). Although the amount was smaller than other statement, the majority of respondents were likely to make impulse purchase when there was a signage available. The essential of signage is proved, therefore e-merchants should combine different types of signage identified by Ha & al. (2007, 485) to adapt the signage into their shopping environment.

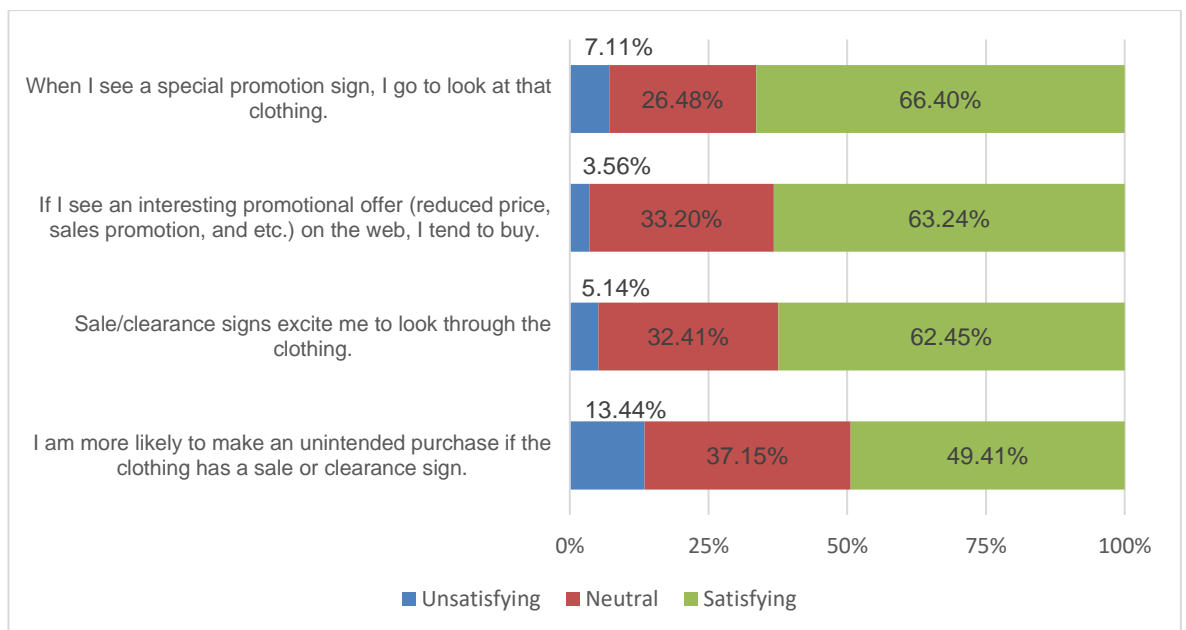


Figure 24: Respondent's evaluation on promotion signage

To put all things in the nut shell, the experience on the website is important as the website now represents the physical store. The design factor is vital; the color combination and background must fit with the theme and the customer's preference. The browsing experience would be effective if the product is able to catch the customer attention. The important of promotion signage had been proven as it might create impulse behavior. On the other hand, background music has proven not effective in the website store context.

4.2.4 Aesthetics of presentation

The majority of respondents agreed that the aesthetics of product and website were important. It is essential that the aesthetics of product presentation and website must match the audience's aesthetics (Figure 25). Product aesthetics serves as signal and cues of the product to inform the shoppers about the product's characteristics (Peng & al. 2017, 190). The matching product aesthetics enhances shopping intention. Website aesthetics needs to be combined between elements: color applications, display of product and product complexity (Wang & al. 2010, 935). If website aesthetics is managed, the consumers are likely to browse the website more.

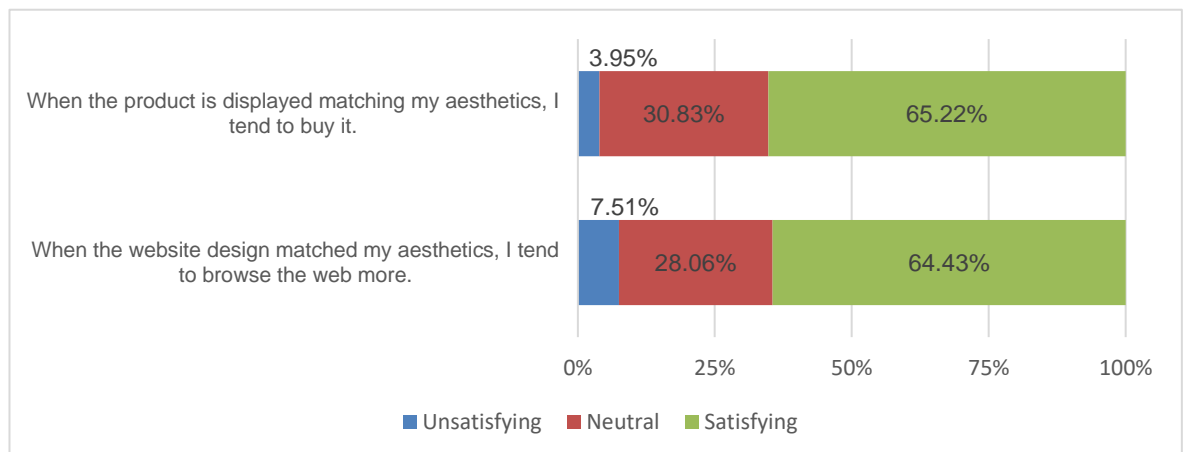


Figure 25: Respondent's evaluation on aesthetics of presentation

4.2.5 Online visual merchandising and its elements

All three elements of online visual merchandising received positive satisfying statement from the respondents (Figure 26). The respondents mostly chose Neutral (2) and Satisfying (3) point. Therefore, online visual merchandising is proved to have influence on consumer's impulse buying behavior. Aesthetics of presentation and website environment had bigger influences on impulse buying with mean of 2.59 and 2.44. Manner of presentation received the mean of 2.23. The mean point of the total online visual merchandising

was 2.42, which approved the influence of online visual merchandising and its elements on impulse purchasing.

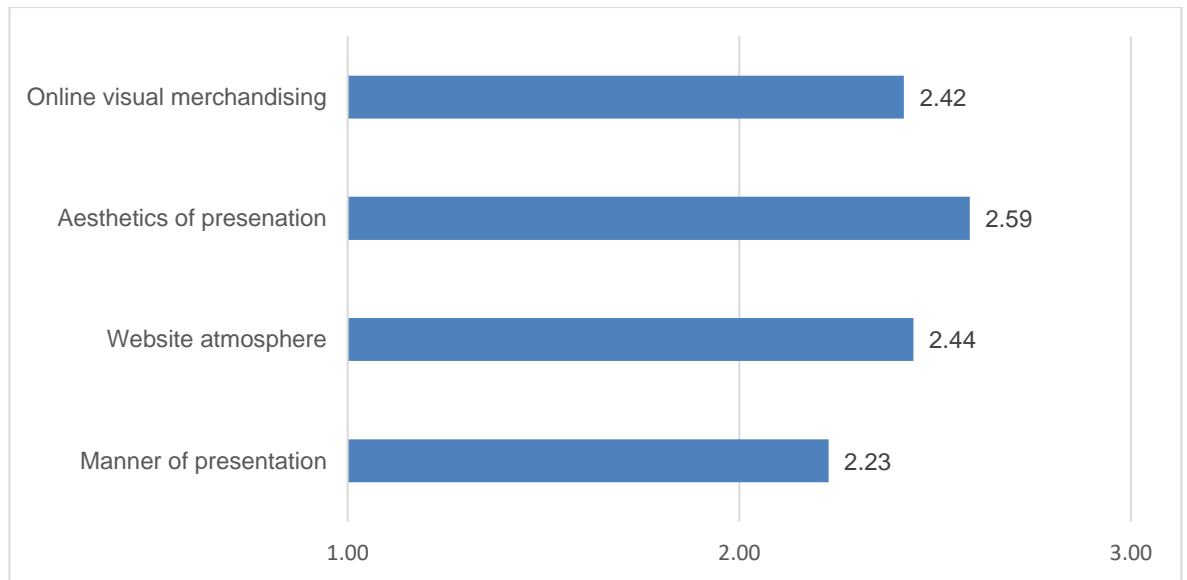


Figure 26: Means of online visual merchandising and online visual merchandising elements.

4.3 Summary

Overall, the online visual merchandising has positive influences on impulse purchasing behavior. In details, some elements have positive impact on impulse buying, while some others have negative impact. Visual displays help consumers to get the idea of what to purchase. Moreover, consumers prefer to have human model with similar body shapes to theirs. The preferred product stimulation is through videos, the least preferred one is through two-dimensional display, which is the display of the majority of website. Website environment is an important element of the whole online buying experience, due to the fact that the website now takes the job of the physical store. All design factors of website will affect customer's browsing section. Promotion signage has proven itself the undeniable advantages in urging the impulse behavior of customers. The aesthetic of product presentation and website are preferred to be matched with the customers' preference; therefore, identifying the main target customer's aesthetic viewpoint is essential.

5 Discussion

The following chapter discusses the key findings of the whole research and analyzes the online visual merchandising of Veo's website and gives recommendation for the company. Suggestion for future research and the author's own learning are also mention in the later part of the chapter.

5.1 Key findings of the study

Online visual merchandising is a relatively new aspect compared to the traditional brick – and – mortar stores visual merchandising. However, there is a lack of literature on this topic and online visual merchandising is not studied in a good manner (Ha & al 2007, 477). Based on traditional literature about traditional visual merchandising by Pegler (2012) and Diamond and Diamond (2011) and some rare research about online visual merchandising of Ha & al. (2007) and Khakimdjanova and Park (2005), a desktop re-search about online visual merchandising practice on apparel website had been carried out.

Online visual merchandising involves three main elements: manner of presentation, web-site environment and aesthetics of presentation. All visual merchandising elements that concerns with product presenting and product information presenting are considered manner of presentation (Ha & al. 2007, 486). Manner of presentation involves with product presentation, presentation techniques and supplementary presentation. Website environment serves as the characteristic of shopping environment for the customers. Building a suitable website for shopper's browsing requires investment. Szymanski & Hise (2000, 313) indicated that site design is one of the most essential element that influences consumer's e-satisfaction. Last but not least, the aesthetics of presentation combines the work of the previous two elements. Aesthetics of presentation involves with product aesthetics and website aesthetics, which are required for consumer's online shopping experiences.

Impulse buying has been defined by Rook (1987, 191) as an immediate and sudden purchase without any buying intension. Different factors can affect the impulse buying behavior, such as situational or personality traits (Kim 2003, 15-18). However, the research mainly focuses on an external factor, online visual merchandising, and its effect on impulse buying. Previous studies by Kim (2003) and Bhattia and Latif (2013) proved a relationship between traditional visual merchandising and impulse buying. Therefore, a relationship between online visual merchandising and impulse buying is considered.

Research was carried out in order to examine the influence of online visual merchandising towards impulse buying. The research was based on quantitative research method and was carried out as online surveys. The result shows that online visual merchandising and all of its three elements in general have positive influences on impulse behavior. However, in detail of each element, some aspects showed significant impacts, which are summarized here.

In manner of presentation, customers prefer human model than any type of product presentation. They also favor video presentation than any other presentations. Merchandise which are mix – and – match and shown in whole view are likely to be purchased. All the supplementary presentations are supporting impulse buying. Shoppers prefer to have model with similar body shapes. On the other hand, they are likely to check the suggested similar items and coordinated items.

In website environment, an eye – catching front page is the element that draws the consumers firstly. The layout, the background and color theme support the website environment smoothen the consumer's browsing experience in the website. However, background music is not well received by the respondents. One of the most important aspects of website environment is to capture the customer's attention; as the result, they are likely to browse more and be more exposed with the store stimuli. Promotion sign is the element that gathers the most impulse behavior. Promotion signs urge the consumers to check the promotion product, see through the promotion section and customers are easier to purchase when there is a promotion offer available.

The aesthetics of presentation is essential for online visual merchandising. Both product aesthetics and website aesthetics should be displayed according to the customer's preference for better experience.

5.2 Online visual merchandising of Veo's website

The sub – chapter analyses the current online visual merchandising situation of the case company website, in order to see the strengths and weaknesses of the website. The sub – chapter follows and analyze the website according to the online visual merchandising elements pointed out previously.

5.2.1 Veo's manner of presentation

Product presentation

Product presentation on Veo's website is mostly based on human model for apparel products such as top, bottom, outerwear and so on (Figure 27). However, for accessories and shoes, Veo's provides flat-lay or folding presentation as well (Figure 28).

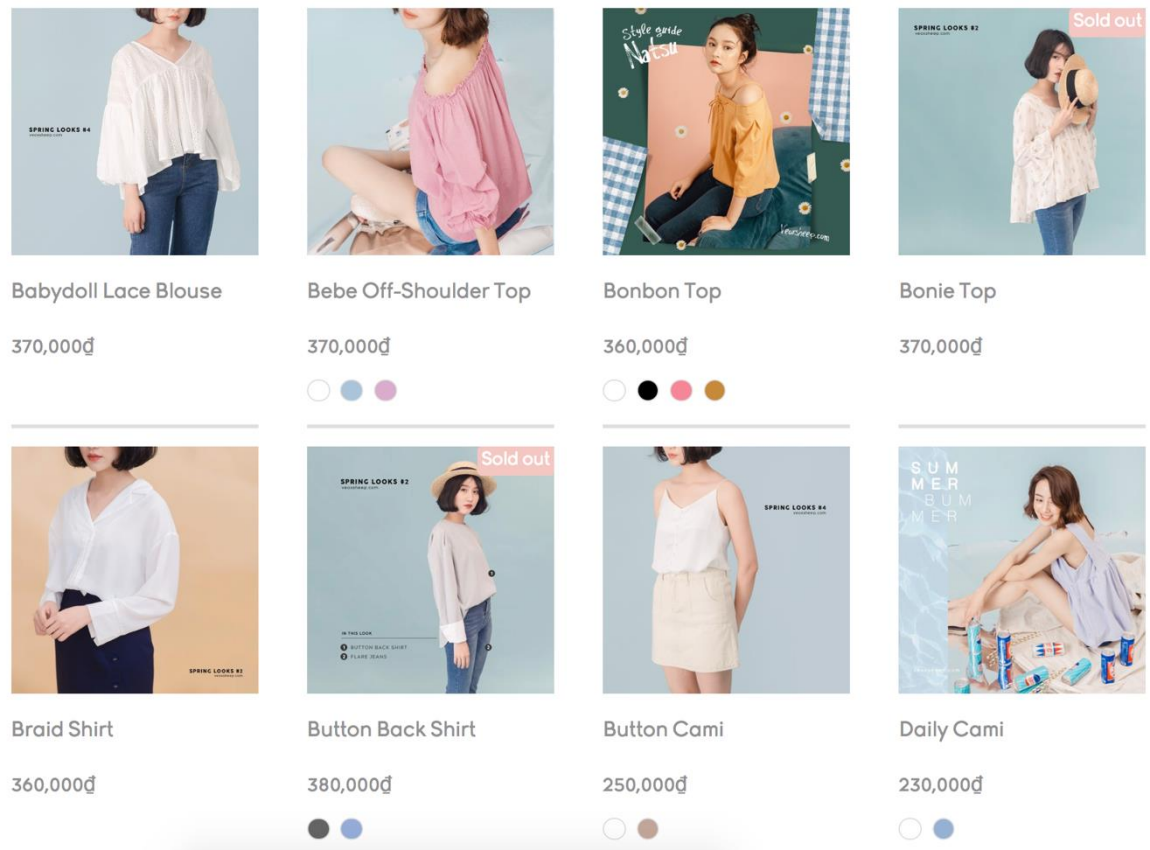


Figure 27: Human model product presentation of Veo's (screenshot)

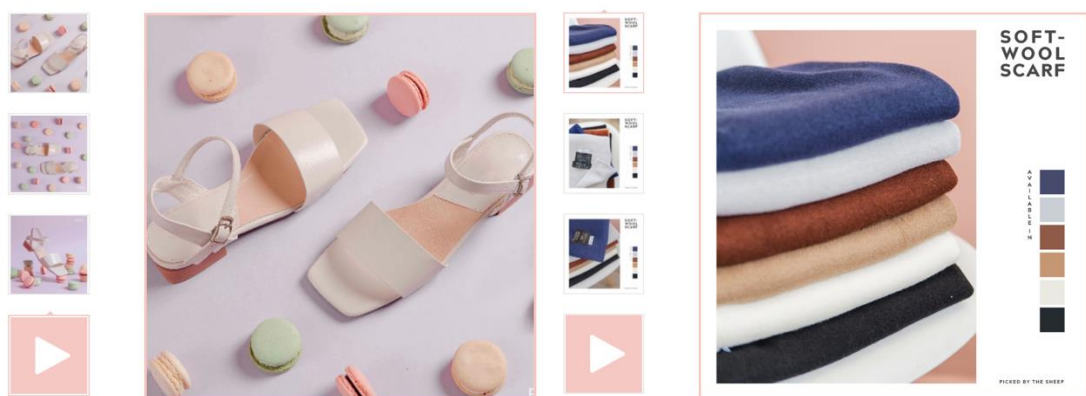


Figure 28: Flat-lay (left) and folding (right) presentation of Veo's (screenshot)

Presentation techniques

All presentations on the website are two-dimensional display only. Even though the website appears to have the “play” symbol picture which means videos, the videos cannot be accessed. For each product and each color, they offer four to five photos of the product (Figure 29). The images have whole view option and detailed focus. They also have zoom-in movement, which allows the consumers to zoom in the products more closely (Figure 30). Coordinated outfit are suggested in the photos and the name of other products are written in the photos as well. The larger images are display right underneath the general info section.

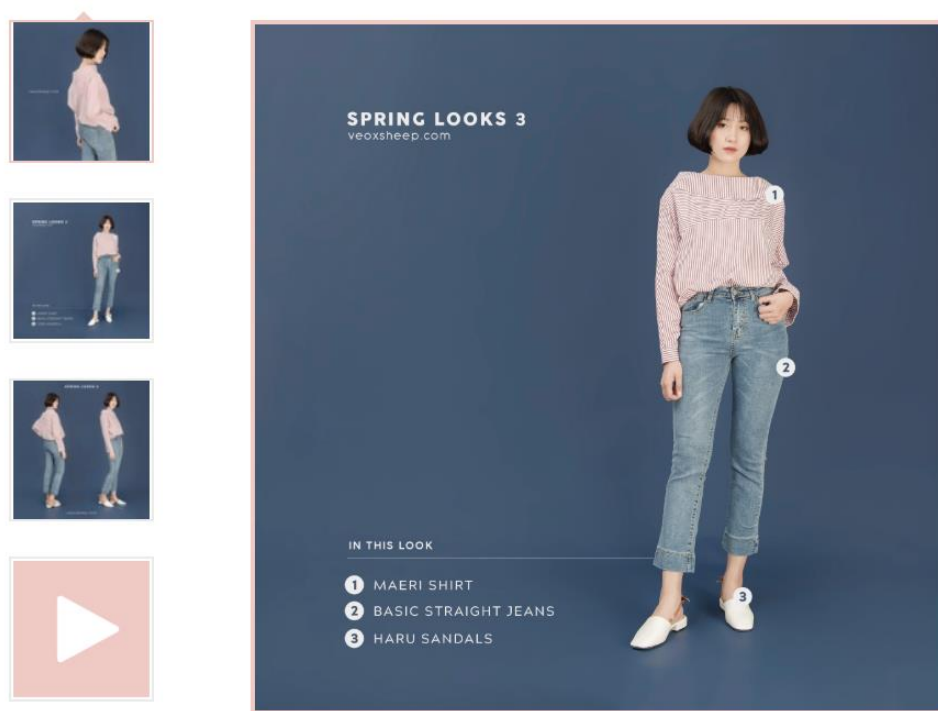


Figure 29: The two-dimensional display: whole view and coordinated outfit option (screenshot)

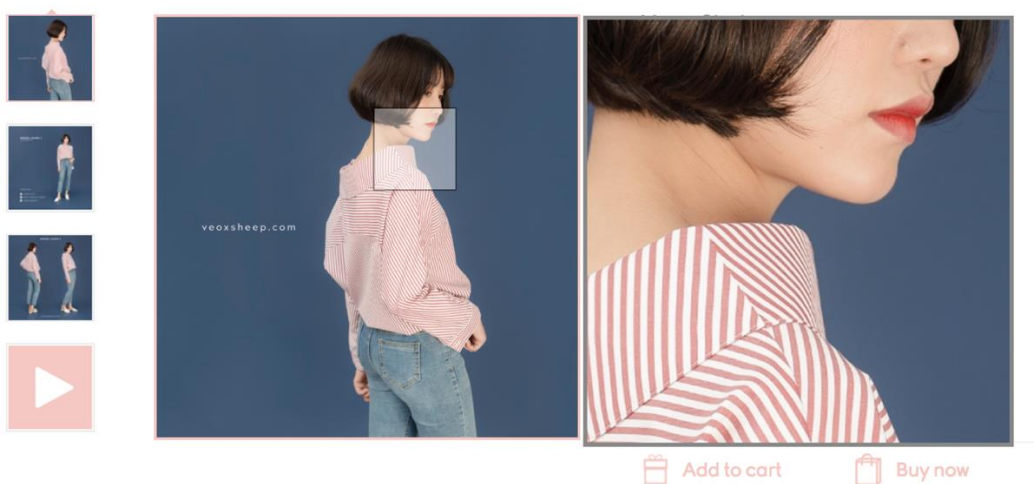


Figure 30: Zoom-in image (screenshot)

Supplementary presentations

The information provided for products are name, price, material, color and size; the information is placed on the right of the product images (Figure 32). One extra information is the model size chart, which displays the model's size, height and weight. The brand offers mix – and – match option for the viewer, the names of suggested items in the coordinated outfit are written in the image. They are also again suggested in the recommendation section below (Figure 31). On the other hand, the brand shows suggested other items, however, these items seem to be suggest randomly instead of similarity (Figure 31).

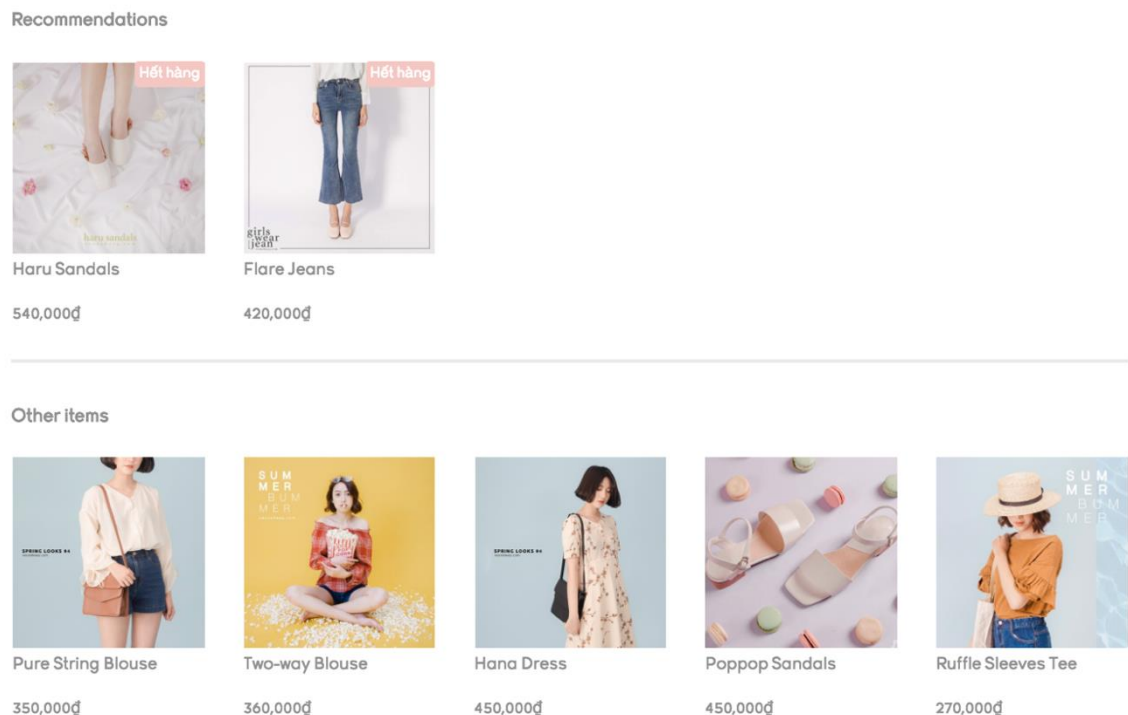


Figure 31: Recommended coordinated products and another items suggestion (screenshot)

Color swatches are available, but cannot be accessed by clicking the color button in the information section. They are displayed under the main product color displays (Figure 32). Veo's only offer one model for a range of their products, therefore there are no other body shapes alternative.

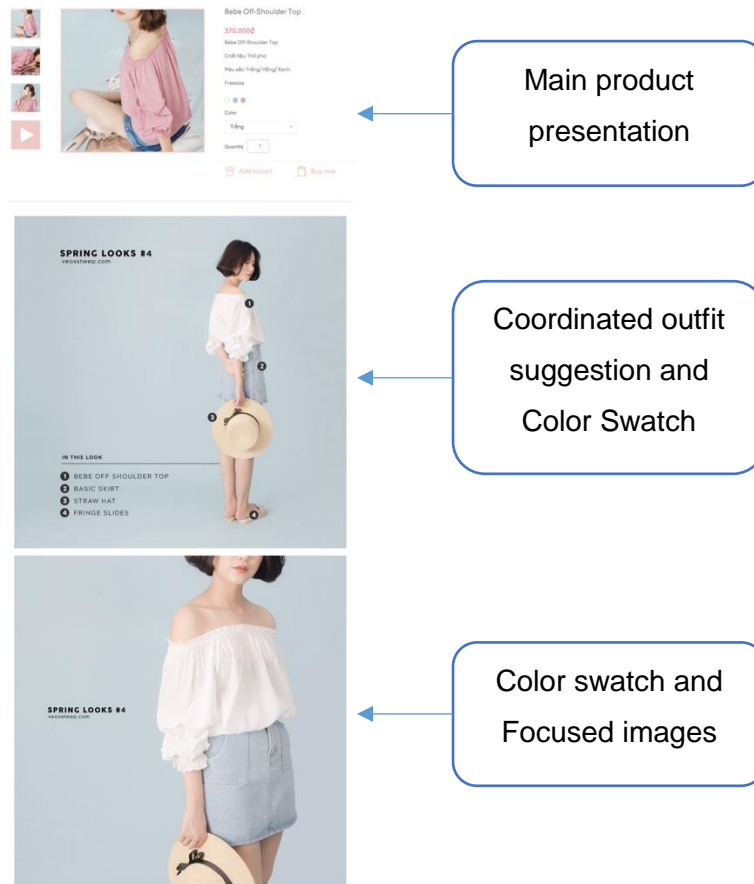


Figure 32: Color swatch displayed under the main product combining with other presentations (screenshot)

Table 2 below summarizes the strengths and weaknesses discussed of Veo's manner of presentation.

Table 2: Strength and weakness of Veo's manner of presentation

Strengths	Weaknesses
Product presentations are displayed well with the mix of human model, flat-lay and folding techniques.	Video presentation is not available (not clickable).
Whole view and coordinated outfit are available.	Only two-dimensional display is available, three-dimensional display is not available in any form.
Zoom-in option is available.	Customers cannot actually enlarge the images, but rather have to zoom-in.
Color swatch is displayed on human model for every other color.	Color swatch cannot be accessed by clicking the color in the information section but

	by scrolling down to see the swatch listed below.
Recommended items are suggested at the end of the page.	The brand suggests random items instead of similar ones.

5.2.2 Veo's website environment

Design

Veo's offers a thematic storefront, featuring the brand's latest collections and news (Appendix 2, Figure 7). They also include an order guide, featured products and a collection's promotion video in the store front. Suggested items of Veo's and The Sheep (the sub-brand) are listed on the front page. The layout of both the front page and other content pages are similar. The contents are mostly in square and are aligned to one another.

Browse, navigation and search engine

The menu bar accessible on the top of right of the website, next to the brand logo, given the following sub-menu: Best, Veo's, The Sheep, Look book, Shopping Guide and Sale. The website is easy to navigate, as they are divided to even smaller sub menus for the customers to access. On the other hand, the left side of the store front offers the search engine, sign in/register option and the shopping cart. The navigation and search engine elements can be viewed in Appendix 2.

Color

The main color theme of Veo's is pastel pink (#EFCAC4), grey (#B2B2B2) and white (FFFFFF) color combination, which are then combined with other colors in the pastel family (Figure 33). The pink color (#EFCAC4) is chosen following to the same color used in the brand's logo. The background of the website is white (FFFFFF).

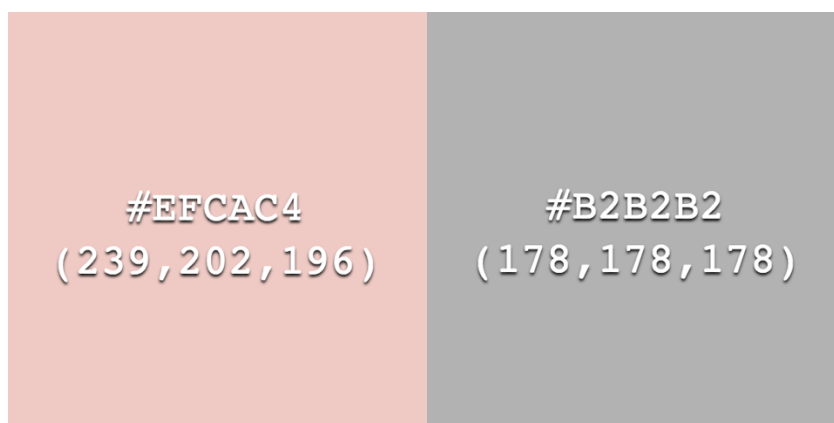


Figure 33: #EFCAC4 and #B2B2B2 color (Color Hex 2018)

Background music

Currently there are no music available in any form on Veo's website.

Signage

There are several types of signage available on the website. At first, the customers are greeted with the pop-up signage informing free shipping information (Figure 34). The small sign on top of the page still confirms about free shipping condition (Figure 34). Another signage available is the combination with the thematic storefront. The signage storefront is sliding horizontal showing the latest news and collections (Appendix 2). In the menu bar, a sale section is available; however, the sale sign does not have any special color or typography to stand out from other section but still keeps the same grey colors (Figure 34).

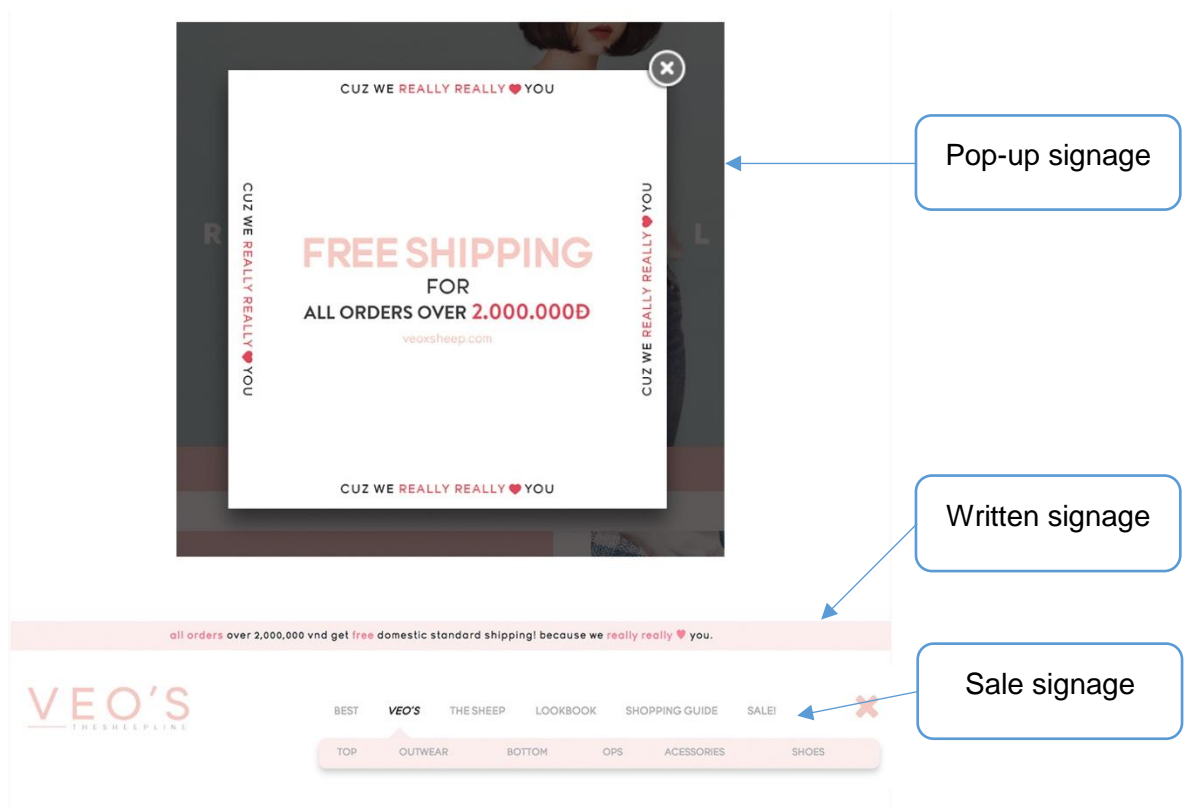


Figure 34: Types of signage available on the website (screenshot)

To put all things in the nut shell, strengths and weaknesses of Veo's website environment are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Strength and weakness of Veo's website environment

Strengths	Weaknesses
-----------	------------

The design of the website theme and layout is clear and synchronized within every section.	There is no background music available in the website.
Veo's website has a thematic storefront.	The sale signage cannot be distinguished from other sub-menus.
The color combination displayed matches the theme of the brand.	The moving sensor picture (the modernized mouse symbol) makes it hard to navigate in the website.
The navigation and search engine is clear and easy to find.	

5.2.3 Veo's aesthetics of presentation

The product aesthetics are significantly shown in the product images. The brand Veo's puts efforts into creating the perfect product presentation. The presentations are synchronized between every product, creating the same theme for the whole website store. The color theme of Veo's is still available in the product presentation. The display holds the pastel theme, with the background changes between various similar pastel colors. The images shown are similar, showing the detailed elements, whole outfit and coordinated items.

The website is the combination of website formality and website appeal. The images are aligned and followed the same pattern. The white background supports the view of the website, enhancing the minimalism and the website formality. On the other hand, website appeal is visible in the featured products or main products of the collection. Some products have special displays and others have synchronized simple ones. However, the white background combined with the strict square displays might make the website feel blended and boring.

Table 4 shows the strengths and weaknesses of Veo's aesthetics of presentation.

Table 4: Strength and weakness of Veo's aesthetics of presentation

Strengths	Weaknesses
Product presentations are thoughtful and they follow the brand's theme.	The white background and strict product presentation might make the website look dull and blend.

The color theme is followed throughout the website.	
The website has both combination of formality and appeal.	

5.3 Recommendation to case company

The case company Veo's newly establish website is thoughtfully well done, with the strengths and weaknesses analyzed in the thesis. The owners of the brand wanted to add website into one of the shopping channels. They expect impulse buying were likely to be happened on website, as the buying process was fast and convenient. In order to broaden the website channel and increase impulse buying on the website by improving online visual merchandising, several recommendations are made as follow.

Manner of presentation

The current product presentation of the brand has been very well-displayed and synchronized, with the mix of human model and other techniques. However, as the two-dimensional display is less preferable by consumers, the brand should add in videos and three-dimensional display for the merchandise. On the other hand, the photo displays are hard to follow, as the shoppers have to scroll down the page to see other swatches. Therefore, creating an additional build-in tabs will create an ease for customers. The current product main photos cannot be accessed and enlarge by clicking in and they are trapped under the small squares. Allowing the photos to enlarge might help the customers better understanding of the merchandise and reduce the customers perceive risks.

Currently the brand has been using only fashion models for the product presentation. However, the research result showed that consumers attempt to buy the products more if the model body shapes are similar to theirs. Consequently, using alternative body shapes which are similar to the target consumers' body shapes could be the wise step for the brand.

Customers are likely to check suggested similar products and coordinated products. The brand has been suggesting coordinated products and random products under the product page. It would be better to alter the suggestion of random products into similar products so that consumers can be exposed to more choices, which might increase impulse behavior.

Website environment

The total atmosphere of the brand is pleasing and minimalist. However, there are some small flaws in the website. The menu bar is blended and it is difficult to navigate the sale signage. Therefore, highlighting the signage would help attract customers browsing more. The color theme of the website has been fitting with the brand's theme color, but sometimes it might become dull and boring due to the fact that it's all white and pastel colors. Add more color into the main color theme might support the website more. There are suggested combination with the main theme color #EFCAC4 in monochromatic, complementary, analogous and triadic color combination in Figure 35.

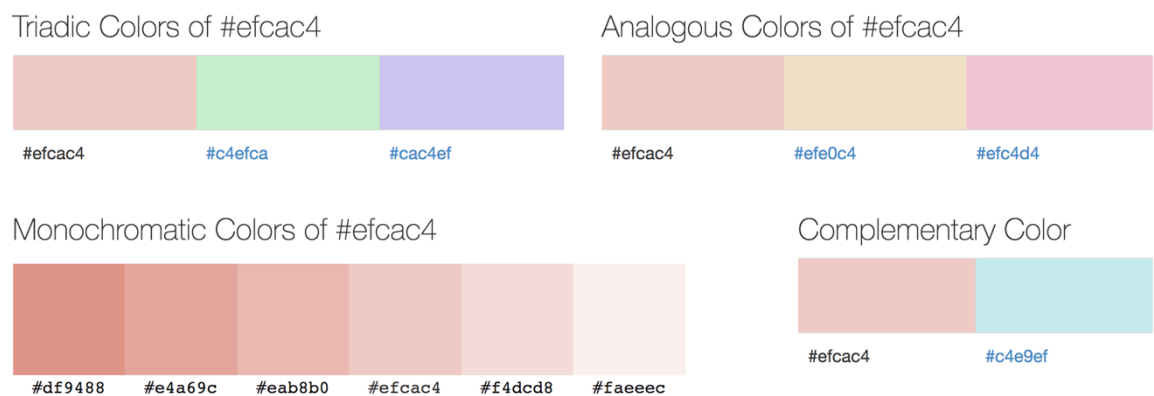


Figure 35: Color combination scheme of color #EFCAC4 (Color Hex 2018)

Aesthetics of presentation

The aesthetics practice of presentation needs to be implemented in both manner of presentation and website atmosphere. The aesthetics of presentation should be implemented based on consumer's preference. Consequently, a research about target customer's aesthetics point-of-view should be carried out for further use.

5.4 Suggestion for future research

As online visual merchandising is rather a new concept, further research about online visual merchandising is needed. The relationship of online visual merchandising and other customer buying behaviors should be analyzed.

On the other hand, impulse buying is triggered by various factors such as person-related, product-related, environment related and situational (Dholakia 2000; Koski 2004). In this research, only external factor as visual online merchandising was considered, therefore, it

would be great to be able to analyzed other factors. Moreover, impulse behavior sometimes is not understood by an individual, which would make the result of quantitative methods have some mistakes. A combination of quantitative and qualitative method is recommended to put the respondents into correct situation.

5.5 The author's own learning

The thesis supports the author to gather knowledge of bachelor years to complete the final study of the bachelor year. The case company had supported well in the thesis process. The author feels grateful to find Veo's as the case company and to do research about an interesting topic. Doing the research on a rather new concept had been a challenge, carrying out the survey was difficult and mistakes that should have been avoidable were made. There were struggle which required the topic to be altered into an unfamiliar aspect, finishing the thesis is a significant achievement. Doing the bachelor thesis, the author has learnt to put the theories learnt at school into practice. The thesis is the long project of bachelor degree which would be supportive in the future's learning.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. The questionnaire surveys

The Influence of Online Visual Merchandising on Impulse Purchasing

Dear participants, I'm Phuong Le, a student of Haaga-Helia UAS. This survey studies the relationship between online visual merchandising and impulse buying behavior for my thesis. Thank you for your participation.

1. What is your age? *

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-30
- ☐ 31-40
- ☐ Over 40

2. What is your gender? *

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

3. What is your marital status? *

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Other, please specify
- ☐ _____

4. What is your employment status? *

- ☐ Full-time
- ☐ Part-time
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Student

5. How is your Internet experience? *

- ☐ Very inexperienced
- ☐ Inexperienced
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Experienced
- ☐ Very experienced

6. Do you have experience with online purchase? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

7. Please mark the sentences below to your preference: *

Impulse buying is the situation when a customer makes a sudden, unintentionally and immediate purchase of a product (Rook 1987; Park & al. 2012).

	Unsatis- fying	Neu- tral	Satisfy- ing
I go shopping to change my mood.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel a sense of excitement when I make an impulse purchase.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After I make an impulse purchase I feel regret.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have difficulty controlling my urge to buy when I see a good offer.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see a good deal, I tend to buy more than that I intended to buy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Please mark the sentences below to your preference: *

	Unsatis- fying	Neu- tral	Satisfy- ing
I get an idea of what I want to buy after looking through the product displays.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see clothing featuring a new style or design on display, I tend to buy it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I tend to rely on store displays when I make a decision to purchase clothing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see clothing that I like on mannequin display, I tend to buy it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see clothing that I like on human model display, I tend to buy it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see clothing that I like on hanger display, I tend to buy it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see clothing that I like on flat-lay display, I tend to buy it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. Please mark the sentences below to your preference: *

	Unsatis- fying	Neu- tral	Satis- fying
When I see products in 2D display, I tend to buy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see products in 3D display, I tend to buy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see products in video display, I tend to buy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see products are shown in whole view, I tend to buy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see the products are mix and match with other products, I tend to buy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When the display can be enlarged, I tend to buy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

When I see movement (displayed image moves constantly), I tend to check the product.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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10. Please mark the sentences below to your preference: *

	Unsatisfying	Neutral	Satisfying
When I see products has large amount of written information, I tend to buy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I tend to check the products suggested to mix with the current product.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I tend to check the products similar to the current product suggested below.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I see products has color swatch (different color try-on), I tend to buy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see products are displayed on body shapes similar to mine, I tend to buy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see products has detailed focus photos, I tend to buy it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Please mark the sentences below to your preference: *

	Unsatisfying	Neutral	Satisfying
I tend to browse a store when I am attracted by an interesting, eye-catching front page.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The layout of the websites affects my browsing section.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see clothing that catches my eye I tend to click on it immediately.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I navigate and browse the web, I tend to look through all clothing sections.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I tend to buy products that I search for in the search engine. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I tend to check other products in the search result. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

12. Please mark the sentences below to your preference: *

- | | Unsat-
isfying | Neu-
tral | Satis-
fying |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| When a website has color theme match my preference, I tend to browse more. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| When a website has good background, I tend to browse the web more. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| When a website has background music, I tend to browse the web more. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| If I see an interesting promotional offer (reduced price, sales promotion, and etc.) on the web, I tend to buy. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Sale/clearance signs excite me to look through the clothing. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| When I see a special promotion sign, I go to look at that clothing. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I am more likely to make an unintended purchase if the clothing has a sale or clearance sign. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

13. Please mark the sentences below to your preference: *

- | | Unsatis-
fying | Neu-
tral | Satis-
fying |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| When the product is displayed matching my aesthetics, I tend to buy it. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| When the website design matched my aesthetics, I tend to browse the web more. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Appendix 2. Front page of Veo's website

